The New Criterion

November 1994

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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Notes & Comments: November 1994

Feminism embraces tribalism

Much as we lament the triumph of political correctness in academia, we must admit that it has done wonders to keep everyone's sense of amazement well exercised. The latest challenge to credibility comes to us from that creaky bastion of academic orthodoxy, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. In its issue for October 12, the *Chronicle* published a brief essay called "White Feminists Who Study Black Writers" in its "Point of View" department. Written by Katherine J. Mayberry, an associate professor of language and literature at the Rochester Institute of Technology, this specimen of feminist-cum-racial handwringing will, we think, test the capacity for amazement of even the most experienced connoisseurs of academic demagoguery. Had the essay been published on April 1st, we might have suspected a joke. Appearing when it did, however, we reluctantly conclude that both Professor Mayberry and the editors of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* intended this blunt compendium of PC sentimentality in earnest.

It is an extraordinary document. Professor Mayberry begins by noting that "the practice of feminist scholarship," which was "born of a radical political movement," is "often more than a strictly academic undertaking." Readers of *The New Criterion* will not be surprised to learn that, on this point at least, we wholeheartedly agree with Professor Mayberry; indeed, we have often had occasion to make a similar observation ourselves. What goes under the name of feminist scholarship, we have argued, is typically more about feminism than scholarship. That is to say, "women's studies programs" and almost everything else that proceeds under the aegis of feminism in the academy are essentially political, not scholarly, enterprises, and as such have no place in the college curriculum.

Needless to say, this is not the conclusion at which Professor Mayberry arrives. As her article makes clear, she—like so many of her colleagues—regards politics as the *raison d'être* of her professional life. But this is only business as usual in the academy today. What sets Professor Mayberry's essay apart is not so much the presence of politics as the collision of two competing politics: specifically, the collision of feminist and racial politics.

Professor Mayberry's ruminations were occasioned by an event that took place recently at an academic conference she attended. As part of a panel on African-American literature, she was to present a paper on Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (a book that, she later suggests, "implicates us all" in racism). It happened that all the participants in that panel, except the moderator, were white

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women. The moderator, a black woman, introduced the other participants and then announced her intention of leaving the room because she was uncomfortable with the "appropriation" by white women of literature written by blacks. Professor Mayberry writes: "She had come to the panel to hear black women talk about black writers, she said, and nothing that white women had to say on the subject could be of any use or interest to her." The moderator and the majority of black women in the audience then left; the session was canceled by the conference coordinator (another white woman, Professor Mayberry informs us), who suggested that the allotted time be used to discuss "the difficult issues of cultural appropriation and racism within feminism."

Professor Mayberry admits that her first reaction to this event was "shocked indignation": "Before ever being heard, the voices of the three presenters had been judged, silenced, and dismissed solely on the ground of race." Later, however, she experienced a wave of "culpability" for her "failure to have considered the cruel ironies of a middle-class white woman's professing to explain and to interpret a powerful slave narrative." Citing the "ruthlessly reductive" book about slaves that a fictional slave-owner writes in *Beloved*, Professor Mayberry concludes that "it now seems to me that any white scholar writing about a work by a black writer may come perilously close" to such reductiveness.

Indeed Professor Mayberry goes further, lamenting that, as critics, "we are still in the business of controlling, organizing, and interpreting texts." Applied to mainstream works, she suggests, the effort to "control, organize, and interpret" literature leads at best to "oversimplification"; applied to works by "marginal cultures," such criticism risks becoming a species of patronizing "appropriation." Professor Mayberry implicates her graduate-school training in this indictment. Having been taught "the tricks of textual mastery," she sadly acknowledges that, for many academic critics, "it doesn't much matter what we write about, as long as we do it deftly and idiomatically. It is a small step from this position to one of assuming that, armed with the right code, we can write about anything, including those works that emerge from a history already deeply scarred by the arrogance of the privileged." Professor Mayberry concludes by calling for a revolution in academic criticism—or at least in feminist academic criticism. She wants to do away with criticism that seeks merely to "interpret" or "explain" a work of literature, in order to encourage more "authentic" responses that acknowledge, for example, racism and the divisive relationship of white, middle-class feminism and black experience.

In other words, Professor Mayberry wishes to reduce criticism to a species of ideological accommodation. By seeking to replace accuracy with "authenticity" as the goal of criticism, she seeks to replace a publicly accessible criterion of judgment with something inscrutibly subjective. Like many academics today, she confuses the issue by recasting the notion of independent criticism into a political melodrama where the goal is not so much understanding as expiation. This is one reason that words like "power," "control," and "oppression" loom so large in her verbal demonology. For Professor Mayberry, the ideal of objective truth is indistinguishable from political subjugation: hence the traditional goals of scholarship—responsible interpretation and explanation—must give way to the mysticism of an "authentic response" in which one's sex or race or ethnic origin determines the nature of one's access to knowledge. Professor Mayberry is quite right to take exception to the idea that "armed with the right code, we can write about anything." This "technique," fostered especially by deconstruction and post-structuralist criticism, is a recipe for intellectual frivolity. But the legitimate alternative is careful interpretation and a respect for factual truth, not a descent into the new tribalism demanded by political correctness.

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Bennington College, R.I.P.

In Chapter VIII of *The Prince*, "Of Such as Have Achieved Sovereignty by Means of Crimes," Machiavelli offers this bit of advice: "In taking possession of a state, the conqueror should well reflect as to the harsh measures that may be necessary and then execute them at a single blow." We were reminded of this helpful hint for despots and politically correct college administrators by some events that took place last June at Bennington College, the small, very trendy, very expensive school in southwestern Vermont. Pleading financial exigency, Elizabeth Coleman, Bennington's president, suddenly fired a third of the faculty; she abolished tenure for newly hired faculty and eliminated all teaching positions in several disciplines, including art history, politics, economics, foreign languages, and the teaching of musical instruments. At the same time, she and her Board of Trustees outlined a new educational program that read more like a parody of clichés about progressive education than a serious pedagogical proposal.

These developments were duly reported and criticized in various publications, from *Lingua Franca* and *The Village Voice* to *The Boston Globe* and *Newsweek*. But the appearance of a cover story in *The New York Times Magazine* on October 23 about the situation at Bennington leads us to offer this brief recapitulation. Readers interested in the particulars of the story will want to consult the earlier reports; those with a robust appetite for pretentious academic rhetoric laced with New Age pedagogical nostrums will also wish to peruse the "Symposium Report of the Bennington College Board of Trustees." This collector's item will surely go down in American pedagogical history as one of the most embarrassingly jejune documents ever disseminated by an institution of higher education.

Most of those who are familiar with the situation at Bennington know that the college is finished as an institution of higher learning. Barring some radical reorganization of the administration and the Board of Trustees, the former home of such luminaries as Martha Graham, W. H. Auden, Kenneth Burke, Bernard Malamud, and Anthony Caro will soon either close up shop altogether or degenerate further into a kind of camp for well-heeled adolescents with vague "creative" yearnings and little talent.

What makes the Bennington fiasco an object lesson for those concerned about the incursions of political correctness into academic life is the authoritarian manner in which the college administration conducted its purge of the faculty—a manner which suggested to knowledgeable observers that old scores were being settled rather than that serious new educational programs were being instituted. For anyone who cares about the ideals of due process and academic freedom—not to mention intellectual standards—the authoritarian depredations at Bennington must stand as an ominous sign.

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The ghost of V. L. Parrington

by Hilton Kramer

In May 1928, the Pulitzer Prize in History was awarded to Vernon Louis Parrington, an English professor at the University of Washington, for the first two volumes of his *Main Currents in American Thought*. The Pulitzer committee's enthusiasm for Parrington's work was apparently so great that it awarded him two thousand dollars —twice the sum that went to the winners that year in Poetry (Edwin Arlington Robinson for *Tristram*), in Fiction (Thornton Wilder for *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*), and in Drama (Eugene O'Neill for *Strange Interlude*). In the History category, moreover, *Main Currents in American Thought* had beat out another strong contender for that year's Pulitzer—Charles A. Beard's *The Rise of American Civilization*. Yet Parrington was not himself a professional historian, nor was he known to the public as a man of letters. The first two volumes of *Main Currents in American Thought* were the only two books he published during his lifetime to win public attention. He died in 1929 at the age of fifty-eight, leaving the third volume only partially completed. It was published posthumously in 1930, and the entire work immediately won a place of unrivaled authority for its pronouncements on American literature. For a decade or more, Parrington was the single most important influence on the way American literature was studied in the colleges and universities, and this was at a time when American literature was only just beginning to be a subject of widespread academic study. Howard Mumford Jones, who would later become a well-known Harvard scholar in this field, spoke for many members of his academic generation when, in a letter to Parrington in 1928, he confidently declared that "I think you bid fair to become a classic. Looking backward, historians of American literature will . . . date their studies A.P. and B.P." And a classic Parrington did indeed become for a time.

What Parrington actually wrote in *Main Currents* was not a history of literature, however. "I am not a critic," Parrington said of himself, apparently believing that this rejection of the critical vocation exempted him from any obligation to deal with writers as literary artists. What he was mainly interested in was politics and economics. Writers who failed to meet his rather facile standard of political merit were generally judged to have failed at their task. "Essentially," wrote Richard Hofstadter in *The Progressive Historians*, "Parrington's three volumes are a history of the literary aspect of American politics and of the most overtly political aspects of American letters." It was thus the priority that Parrington gave to political criteria over literary standards that commended *Main Currents* to his academic admirers and made the work a classic. As Hofstadter wrote in what remains the best account of *Main Currents* we have:

> Parrington's assumption that the experience recorded in *belles lettres* is more restricted in

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> range—"narrower"—than experience in the political realm, and that literary ideas are in some way subordinate or posterior to political ideas led him to a rather stark politicization of literature.

As for what this politicization of literature entailed, consider the following passages:

On Edgar Allan Poe:

> The problem of Poe, fascinating as it is, lies quite outside the main current of American thought, and it may be left with the psychologist and the belletrist with whom it belongs. It is for abnormal psychology to explain his "neural instability amounting almost to a dissociated or split personality," his irritable pride, his quarrelsomeness, his unhappy persecution complex, his absurd pretensions to a learning he did not possess, his deliberate fabrications about his life and methods of work, his oscillations between abstinence and dissipation, between the morbidly grotesque and the lucidly rational, his haunting fear of insanity that drove him to demonstrate his sanity by pursuing complex problems of ratiocination. Such problems are personal to Poe and do not concern us here.

On Herman Melville:

> An arch romantic, he vainly sought to erect his romantic dreams as a defense against reality, and suffered disaster. In love with the ideal, and pursuing it in a wild adventure into the South Seas . . . yet "not so much bound to any haven ahead as rushing from all havens astern," he found there only disenchantment. Seeking his satisfactions in love of mother and wife, he came upon utter disillusion.

On Henry James:

> The explanation of the curious career of Henry James, seeking a habitation between worlds and finding a spiritual home nowhere, is that he was never a realist. Rather he was a self-deceived romantic, the last subtle expression of the genteel, who fell in love with culture and never realized how poor a thing he worshiped. . . . It is not well for the artist to turn cosmopolitan, for the flavor of the fruit comes from the soil and sunshine of its native fields. . . . how unlike he is to Sherwood Anderson, an authentic product of the American consciousness!

Given the crudity of such judgments, it is not surprising that *Main Currents*'s status as a classic proved to be short-lived. For readers outside the academy—even those who shared his populist-philistine approach to literature—Parrington was soon supplanted by Van Wyck Brooks, whose five-volume history of American literature, beginning with *The Flowering of New England* in 1936, enjoyed a popularity that *Main Currents* never attained. As a writer Brooks was a literary artist, which Parrington—despite some failed efforts in that direction—was not. Parrington wrote about literature as a political moralist, rejecting everything that did not meet his narrow standard of social "reality," whereas Brooks—despite his animadversions on "coterie-literature," which came to include virtually all the modern classics—brought to the depiction of the American literary past the talents of a first-rate genre painter. Whatever their philosophical similarities—and notwithstanding the intellectual influence they undoubtedly exerted upon each other—Brooks belonged to the belletristic tradition that Parrington categorically scorned in the writing of *Main Currents*, and this guaranteed Brooks a continuing readership long after Parrington was forgotten.

Meanwhile, the real literary debate—the one that would determine the course of literature and literary study for much of the second half of the twentieth century in this country—was taking place elsewhere. This was the debate over the modern classics which Parrington and Brooks had both rejected. In that debate, the immense influence of T. S. Eliot—a writer nowhere mentioned in the three volumes of *Main Currents*—was crucial, and the revival of interest in Melville

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and James also played a large role. Eliot was already a force to be reckoned with in the Twenties while Parrington was writing and revising the work that would become *Main Currents*, and the James revival began in the Thirties while Parrington's influence was at its zenith in the universities and, owing to the political ideology that shaped its every literary judgment, *Main Currents* was embraced by the political Left. By the Forties, however, the growing importance of the New Criticism as a basis for literary study was rapidly relegating Parrington to the dustbin of history. When I was an undergraduate in the late Forties, Parrington was already a relic of a discredited past, and the brighter students studying American literature quickly learned to avoid the professors who still based their teaching on the outmoded tenets of *Main Currents*.

The death knell for Parrington had been sounded by Lionel Trilling with an article called "Parrington, Mr. Smith, and Reality" in *Partisan Review* in 1940. (Bernard Smith, whose *Forces in American Criticism* was published in 1939, was a Marxist critic whose views supported Parrington's.) The venue of the Trilling attack was significant, for only four years earlier, at a time when the magazine was published under the auspices of the Communist Party and was indeed still called *Partisan Review and Anvil*, Carl van Doren had published an article in its pages entitled "To the Left: To the Subsoil," which essentially upheld the Parringtonian reading of American literature. "Much of the best American literature has always inclined toward the Left," van Doren wrote. "Reading older American writers now, we fail to realize how often they were logically and emotionally revolutionary in their times." Not surprisingly, Theodore Dreiser was accorded more attention than any other American writer mentioned in the article, and Henry James was simply omitted.

The *Partisan Review* to which Trilling contributed "Parrington, Mr. Smith, and Reality" in 1940 was no longer quite the same journal. It had broken with the Communist Party, and while still Marxist in their politics, its editors had opened the magazine to a wider range of critical thought, especially in regard to the classics of modern literature, which they strongly favored. Trilling's attack on Parrington thus represented a split on the literary and academic Left, and was part of a larger effort by disabused literary radicals to rescue the complexities of literature from the simplifications of populist and "progressive" ideology. Two years later, when Alfred Kazin published *On Native Grounds*, he quoted Trilling's charge that Parrington "does not have the perception to understand our best artists," and then restated the indictment by writing: "what one sees in [Parrington's] unfortunate chapters on Poe, Hawthorne, Henry James, and Melville, among others, is that he was not moved by the creative mind save as it revealed itself in the public domain of political and economic polemic. . . . What ailed him, very simply, was an indifference to the problems of art."

Given this implacable hostility to "the problems of art," which gives to *Main Currents* its suffocating atmosphere of philistine rectitude and makes it such a ludicrous guide to literary achievement, it is of considerable interest to learn from a new biographical study of the writer—H. Lark Hall's *V. L. Parrington: Through the Avenue of Art*—that his initial ambition in life was to be, of all things, a painter! [1] This early aspiration to pursue the artist's vocation seems to have come to Parrington unbidden by circumstance or experience. It took possession of him while he was still in his teens in Emporia, Kansas, and remained enough of an interest when he got to Harvard in the early 1890s for him to enroll in Charles Herbert Moore's course in the "Principles of Delineation, Color, and Chiaroscuro." There it was soon overtaken by a study of John Ruskin, to whose writings on art Moore's course introduced Parrington, and then by an

1 *V. L. Parrington: Through the Avenue of Art*, by H. Lark Hall; Kent State University Press, 360 pages, $39.

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immersion in the work of William Morris, whose socialist aesthetic, as Ms. Hall writes, "would markedly shape Parrington's ideas concerning the function of art and the artist in society."

While at Harvard, moreover, Parrington exhibited another kind of artistic aspiration by trying his hand at fiction. In a composition course taught by Barrett Wendell, who was then writing one of the early histories of American literature, Parrington undertook to compose a long story, in six chapters, called "The House of Memoire." As Ms. Hall writes, "the story's greatest debts are to Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne." In the diary Parrington kept during his Harvard years (1891–93), he again and again expressed his delight in Poe's work—"poetical as well as prose"—and was especially enthusiastic about Poe's stories. He pronounced them "marvels of clearness and elegance." "A better exemplification of the rules which should govern literary work, I have never seen," he wrote, expressing the wish that "there were more Poe's among our geniuses."

About Hawthorne he was equally admiring. "I fairly love Hawthorne," he confided to his diary in 1892. "He is my favorite, par excellence, of all writers. Quaint, subtle, chaste, elegant—his style is nearly perfect." About the fiction of William Dean Howells, who would later become one of the exemplary figures in *Main Currents*, he was very critical. "I am doing my best to understand Howells's qualities," he wrote, "but am not able to yet. I must admit I don't like his bald, crude realism."

Quite the most interesting thing in Ms. Hall's study of Parrington is her account of what can only be called his early aestheticism, which seems to have intensified during his Harvard years as his religious faith declined. In this respect, Parrington emerges from Ms. Hall's study as very much a figure of the 1890s, swooning over Sarah Bernhardt's performances in *Cléopâtre* and *Leah*, which he saw in Boston, and dreaming about William Morris's medievalized vision of an earthly utopia. This aestheticism continued to guide Parrington's interests for some years after he left Harvard. It spurred him to travel to England and France, and soon took the form of a serious interest in architecture, which became what Ms. Hall characterizes as "a passionate avocation." A decade after he quit Cambridge, in the culturally deprived climate of Norman, Oklahoma, where he had gone to teach at the state university, Parrington published his first non-academic article—an essay, "On the Lack of Privacy in American Village Homes," in *House Beautiful*. And in Norman he designed and built a house that satisfied his Morris-inspired aesthetic tastes. Meanwhile, upon discovering that he had no talent for fiction, he turned to the writing of poetry, and then failed at that, too. At the age of thirty, in 1901, Parrington was still a man without an intellectual vocation. His academic career was foundering, too, a casualty of local politics and provincial prejudice.

In 1908 he was saved from disaster by an appointment to teach at the University of Washington in Seattle, where he had to take both a cut in salary and a cut in rank. Yet this demotion in his professional status turned out to mark the beginning of a new career for Parrington. Ms. Hall speaks of the "conversion experience" that changed Parrington's intellectual outlook in Seattle. By 1918, after a decade at the University of Washington, he was speaking of his years as a Harvard aesthete with unconcealed bitterness. "The past five years," he wrote in answer to a query from his class secretary at Harvard, "I have spent in study and writing, up to my ears in the economic interpretation of American history and literature, getting the last lingering Harvard prejudices out of my system. I become more radical with every year, and more impatient with the smug Tory culture which we were fed on as undergraduates." He pronounced Harvard "a liability rather than an asset to the cause of democracy. It seems to me the apologist and advocate of capitalistic exploitation."

And in the "Autobiographical Sketch" he

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wrote about his career that same year, he defined the nature of the work he was now totally absorbed in.

> I was still the bookman, drawing my nourishment from *belle lettres*. Consciously I was neither radical nor conservative, and yet my reading was drawing me inevitably out of the narrower field of polite literature into the new world of social thought that was rising about me. Carlyle, Ruskin, Morris became increasingly my teachers—above all others Morris. I have always been a rebel, I think, but with the bias of my training in art and letters I must enter the field of radicalism through such an avenue if at all. My economics must be sugar-coated for me. Shelley ought to have aroused me, or William Blake; but they did not. And it was not till William Morris came with the charm of his prose style that I was shaken out of the lethargy of the cultural. To enter the field of modern social thought through the avenue of art, may seem strange to a younger generation; but it was a common experience in days when Ruskin and Morris were prophets to a world content with its smug Manchesterism.

It needs to be recalled, of course, that the aestheticism of the 1890s, which also owed much to Ruskin and Morris, had always contained a marked animus against the "materialism," as it was usually called, of the modern industrial era. Which is to say, that aestheticism was itself a species of social radicalism, as the career of Oscar Wilde, for example, reminds us. In this respect, at least, Parrington may well have been correct in claiming that he had "always been a rebel." Yet there remains something incommensurable about the intellectual violence with which Parrington turned against the beliefs and affinities that had guided his early life. The work he produced in *Main Currents* is so much cruder, so much more one-dimensional, than anything to be found in Ruskin or Morris, that it cannot really be taken to be the intellectual offspring of those writers. Nor does *Main Currents* speak with any real authority about the social and economic ideas with which Parrington attempted to supplant the "belletristic" approach to literary thought. In many respects, *Main Currents in American Thought* is the work of an intellectual amateur and a literary crank. Richard Hofstadter wrote of the "essential sameness" of Parrington's literary judgments, "the predictable uniformity of his reproaches, the forceful, if rather indirect suggestion that most of these writers suffered from the same combination of vanity and selfishness, the same lack of robustness and realism." In the end, as Hofstadter shrewdly observed, "Parrington had cast himself in a role he particularly disliked —that of the 'narrow belletrist' writing upon matters concerning which the wisdom of 'the economist' seems more important. He preached with the desperation of a minister who doubts his own salvation."

Yet this was the muddled writer whose influence held sway over academic opinion for a generation or more, and whose ideological ghost still haunts the academic world today, even though he is now unread. What Lionel Trilling described in *The Liberal Imagination* as "the literary academicism of liberalism" now once again enjoys a resurgence under political auspices even more lethal than Parrington's. Between the dismissal of literature as mere belletrism in *Main Currents* and the warning issued in 1989 by the American Council of Learned Societies against "belle lettrists who unself-consciously sustain traditional hierarchies, traditional social and cultural exclusions," etc., there is an obvious line of ideological descent for anyone who cares to study it. In this sense, the ghost of V. L. Parrington is alive and well in our own version of "the literary academicism of liberalism."

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Philip Johnson: the architect as aesthete

by Roger Kimball

Le stupide et le bel esprit sont également fermés à la verité; il y a toutefois cette différence que le stupide esprit la respecte, tandis que le bel esprit la méprise.

The stupid person and the wit are equally blind to truth; there is, however, this difference, that the stupid person respects truth while the wit despises it.
—Nicolas Malebranche

Effect before everything.
—Philip Johnson

As one considers the confused and confusing story of contemporary architecture, no figure looms larger or is more controversial than the prolific doyen of postmodernism, Philip Johnson. Now in his eighty-ninth year, Johnson has been a force in the architectural world since 1932. Although he did not begin practicing architecture until the 1940s (and did not manage to pass his licensing examination until well into the 1950s), his collaboration with Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Jr., on "The International Style: Architecture Since 1922" at the fledgling Museum of Modern Art in New York was a ground-breaking event. The exhibition, which opened in February 1932, toured thirteen American cities after closing at MOMA. A model of serious and innovative scholarship, it introduced American viewers to such important European modernists as Mies van der Rohe, Corbusier, and J. J. P. Oud, baptized one of the most influential architectural movements of the century ("The International Style" soon became a slogan for both friends and foes of modernism), and instantly established the intellectual reputation of its rich, dashing twenty-six-year-old co-curator.

It is a reputation that has evolved—some might say mutated—greatly. In 1949, soon after he began practicing architecture, Johnson took the architectural world by storm with the controversial Glass House he built on his estate in New Canaan, Connecticut. Inspired by a then-unbuilt design by Mies van der Rohe, the exquisitely sited house consists of a floor, a flat roof, and four walls of floor-to-ceiling glass. Inside, a brick cylinder contains a bathroom and fireplace. There is one free-standing cabinet, one counter, and a few pieces of furniture by Mies. When he came to see it, Frank Lloyd Wright wickedly asked "Is it Philip? . . . And is it architecture?" Maybe not. But the Glass House is, as Franz Schulze notes in his new biography of the architect,[1] "one of the most famous residences of the twentieth century, a work of architecture that at first glance is not only simplicity itself but to some eyes egregious simplicity." In the 1970s and 1980s, when postmodernism swept the country, Johnson was probably the busiest "upscale" architect in the United States. His buildings

1 *Philip Johnson: Life and Work*, by Franz Schulze; Knopf, 496 pages, $30.

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from that period dot cityscapes from Boston, New York, and Atlanta to Minneapolis, Chicago, Houston, Dallas, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. He has been the recipient of every major award that his profession confers. But his celebrity goes far beyond the confines of the architectural profession. In 1979, for example, soon after his infamous "Chippendale" design for the AT&T building was unveiled, he was pictured on the cover of *Time* magazine, a token of celebrity that few architects can match.

At the same time, it must be said that for many years now Johnson's fame has really been a species of assiduously cultivated notoriety. The apparent earnestness that characterized his early activities as a disciple of Mies and as founding director of MOMA's department of architecture is a distant memory. The "new" Philip Johnson, who began emerging in the 1960s, is the man who in 1982 responded to criticism of one of his projects by declaring "I do not believe in principles. . . . I am a whore and am paid very well for building high-rise buildings." For many observers, the cynicism of this statement finds a correlative not only in Johnson's buildings but also in his impish if articulate sponsorship of every new architectural trend, no matter how meretricious. Johnson's craving for publicity has assured that the general outlines of his life are well known. But Mr. Schulze's new biography allows us to step back and take the measure of Philip Johnson's career—a career that, for better or worse, is in many ways emblematic not only of the plight of contemporary architecture but also of our "postmodern" cultural situation.

Mr. Schulze is certainly well qualified to undertake Johnson's biography. In addition to having written two books on the architecture of Chicago, he is also the author of a superb critical biography of Philip Johnson's first architectural inspiration, Mies van der Rohe. One of Mr. Schulze's main achievements in that 1985 study was to illuminate the larger intellectual and historical context of Mies's elegant but often elusively abstract architecture. Adopting a tone that was appreciative but not uncritical, he dissected with unparalleled clarity the fundamental aesthetic problems that Mies struggled to solve.

Mr. Schulze has brought the same kind of intellectual sophistication to *Philip Johnson: Life and Work*. But the resulting picture, while certainly vivid, is in the end not as illuminating or authoritative as it was with Mies. This is partly because Philip Johnson presents a much more blurry subject than Mies: one would be hard pressed to define his fundamental aesthetic ideas because they are constantly in flux. (It is not surprising that Heraclitus is one of his favorite philosophers.) Mr. Schulze is correct when he notes, in his preface, that Johnson's "genius was that of a singularly gifted harlequin who forever changed the masks of style on his own work and conducted his personal relationships with comparable whimsicality." How it can also be said that "steadfast commitments and loyalties" and a "studied worldview" have animated all his activities is perhaps less obvious.

If Johnson's mercurial nature is one problem that Mr. Schulze faced in writing this biography, another is the simple fact that he was writing about a living person—an almost insuperable obstacle to grasping the whole truth. In his preface, Mr. Schulze tells us that Johnson did not see any of the biography before it was published and that his book is therefore "an independent and unauthorized work." Perhaps so. But while the portrait of Philip Johnson that emerges in this book is often the opposite of flattering, one sometimes gets the uncomfortable sense that Mr. Schulze was looking over his shoulder as he was writing. Something of this sort is evident not only in the excuses that are made for Johnson's erratic personal behavior but also in some of the judgments of his work and importance.

Still, this is an important biography, perceptive and disquieting by turns. Mr. Schulze proceeds chronologically, taking us from Johnson's childhood in and about Cleveland, Ohio, through his years at the

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Museum of Modern Art, his amazingly productive association with John Burgee from the later 1960s through the 1980s, right up to his current work designing a suite of buildings for the developer Donald Trump.

Born in July 1906, Philip Johnson was the third child and second son of a prosperous, Harvard-educated lawyer and his patrician, Wellesley-educated wife. By the standards of the day, it was a late marriage: Homer Johnson's first two wives had died of tuberculosis and Louise Pope was thirty-two when they married. Their four children were produced in quick succession. The Johnsons' eldest son, Alfred, succumbed to mastoiditis when he was five years old—a fate that, Mr. Schulze speculates, was perhaps precipitated by his parents' settled belief that "fresh air," no matter how cold, was the key to good health. This made young Philip, the "irreplaceable heir," an even more precious asset. Nevertheless, his upbringing, although "uncommonly protected," was not, it seems, particularly affectionate. Philip and his younger sister, Theodate, were and remained very close; but their father was a bluff, somewhat distant character, most at home at his club or on the links. Louise sedulously directed the children's early education. It was she, Mr. Schulze writes, who instructed them "in the good manners and lofty ideas appropriate to her concept of their station and mission in life." Nevertheless, Louise was "a mother of majesty rather than intimacy," who "locomoted with unerring deliberateness, like an ocean liner." She was, Philip later recalled, more "schoolmistress than mother."

Philip was not the first architect in the family. His mother's first cousin, Theodate Pope Riddle, had also been an architect of some repute. Among her works was Avon Old Farms, a boys' school in Farmington, Connecticut, which Mr. Schulze describes as "a fanciful sandstone olio of classical Greek and medieval English components." Given his later embrace of a promiscuous historicism, it is worth noting that Philip's reaction on first seeing it was revulsion. It is "the purest mess you ever saw," he wrote home, "in no particular architecture that I could discover." Among her other accomplishments, incidentally, Theodate Pope Riddle was an ardent spiritualist. She once gave Henry James a document purporting to account for an appearance of his dead brother William at a séance. James responded:

> I return you the dreadful document, pronouncing it without hesitation the most abject and impudent, the hollowest, vulgarest, and basest rubbish I could possibly conceive. Utterly empty and illiterate, without substance or sense, a mere babble of platitudinous phrases, it is beneath comment or criticism, in short beneath contempt.

Mr. Schulze does not say whether there was any further communication between Riddle and James. One somehow suspects not.

Philip's early years were intense, pampered, often unhappy. He developed a stutter (which he subsequently lost) and was given to sudden tantrums and rages. His physical mannerisms, Mr. Schulze notes, "were noticeably light and dainty, rather like a girl's." He was clumsy at sports, and only intermittently did well in school. Inappropriately tricked out in Brooks Brothers suits, young Philip typically found himself eating lunch alone, scorned by his more boisterous classmates. Perhaps the high point of his early years was the trip that he took with his family to Europe after the First World War, which gave him his first, thrilling glimpse of Chartres and Paris.

Things began looking up when Philip went away to the Hackley School in Tarrytown, New York. He spent three years there, studying languages, literature, and piano. The shy child became cocky and self-assured, an important resource for the debating team, theatrical productions, and school publications. Upon graduating, in 1923, he was voted "most likely to succeed." At the same time, Mr. Schulze informs us, he was very lonely and did not make friends easily. It was about this time, it seems, that Philip became aware of his homosexuality, though

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he did not yet embark on the frenetically promiscuous life that he later indulged in.

Like his father, Philip went to Harvard. His first year, undistinguished scholastically, was marked by his father's decision to distribute some of his considerable assets to his heirs. Philip's sisters received a good deal of real estate. Philip got shares in the Aluminum Company of America. Overnight, he became a man of independent means. In the 1920s, when stock in ALCOA soared, he became wealthier than his father, a "millionaire, at a time when the word meant rich, not just comfortable." Philip's new-found wealth was a double blessing: it underwrote his habitual financial generosity to friends, and it placed him in the enviable position of being able to work without a salary at the Museum of Modern Art (and pay his secretary out of his own pocket) and, later, to pick and choose his architectural commissions without regard to fees.

Johnson's years at Harvard were turbulent and protracted. He twice took leaves because of what amounted to nervous breakdowns. (Mr. Schulze refers several times to Johnson's "manic-depressive" states of mind.) Yet it was really at Harvard that his direction in life crystallized. It was not a quick or easy process. He studied Greek and Latin, and persisted with the piano to the point where he considered a career as a pianist. His primary subject, however, was philosophy. In those years, the famous philosopher Alfred North Whitehead was ensconced at Harvard, and Johnson soon became a "fixture" in his classes and at his house. It is in some ways surprising, in light of his later aestheticism, that Johnson at first found himself drawn to Plato, whose "masterful advocacy of the absolute nature of right and wrong as well as his identification of virtue and knowledge carried a special appeal."

The appeal did not last. During the course of 1928, Johnson abandoned Plato for the relativism of the sophists and, especially, Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy of art and the will to power. Like some contemporary philosophers—one thinks in particular of Richard Rorty—Johnson now declared Plato's grand moral vision to be "evil." And as with many contemporary philosophers—Rorty again comes to mind—Johnson's abandonment of Plato was really tantamount to an abandonment of philosophy *tout court*. In the end, Mr. Schulze observes, Johnson was "too impatient, mercurial, and even superficial in his thought processes for Whitehead." Johnson himself noted that Whitehead never flunked his students "but if he gave you a B, it meant the same thing—that you didn't have what it takes. In 1927, he gave me a B."

It was about this time that Johnson's attention began to shift definitively toward the visual arts. (At Harvard, a newly formed Society for Contemporary Art had Edward M. M. Warburg, John Walker, and Lincoln Kirstein as guiding spirits, but they were all younger than Johnson and he remained unacquainted with them until later.) A visit to the Parthenon in 1928 was an important inspiration, as was his discovery the same year of an article by his older Harvard colleague Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Jr., on the Dutch architect Jacobus Johannes Pieter Oud. But according to Mr. Schulze, the single day that "more than any other turned his life around" came in 1929 when Johnson went to Wellesley for Theodate's commencement and met Alfred H. Barr, Jr., the founder of the Museum of Modern Art, which opened the following autumn.

At twenty-seven, Barr was only a few years older than Johnson, but his passion for modern art was as thorough as it was contagious. Although Johnson was in many ways out of his depth—of the three classes on the fine arts that he taken at Harvard, he had dropped two—he fell into animated discussion about art with Barr. "More than any other event in his personal history," Mr. Schulze writes, this chance meeting with Alfred Barr "persuaded him that the labyrinth of his mind had a center." Johnson had considered following his father into the law; he considered taking up an offer to teach classics at Oberlin. Meeting Alfred Barr changed all that for good.

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The first fruit of Johnson's encounter with Barr was to impart a special sense of purpose and direction to the European trip (one of many, many trips) that Johnson planned to take that summer. Barr gave him detailed instructions about what he should see, laying particular emphasis upon those places where the early monuments of modernist architecture were to be found, notably the Bauhaus in Dessau and the Weissenhofsiedlung housing colony in Stuttgart (though he missed an opportunity to see Mies van der Rohe's celebrated German Pavilion at the International Exposition in Barcelona).

The next couple of years were spent in a flurry of productive activity. Johnson returned to the United States, completed work at Harvard for his degree, traveled constantly to New York for discussions with Alfred Barr, and—through Barr's fiancée, Margaret Scolari-Fitzmaurice—met and began working with Henry-Russell Hitchcock on what would turn out to be their exhibition and book on International Style architecture. In April 1930, he was appointed to the advisory committee of MOMA. In 1931, when the Architectural League of New York held their annual exhibition and left out all the promising young architects, Johnson and Barr rented space in a Sixth Avenue storefront and mounted an exhibition of "Rejected Architects" on the pattern of the famous Salon des Refusés of 1863. Writing about the press response to their exhibition ("mixed but lively"), Johnson wrote that "it remained for the Rejected Architects to give the International Style what might be called its first formal introduction to this country."

Then as later, Johnson was tireless and effective as an architectural impresario. He traveled constantly, commissioned Mies to design an apartment in New York, and organized several important exhibitions at MOMA, including, in 1934, "Machine Art," a collection of manufactured objects that were meant, as Mr. Schulze observes, "to demonstrate how that anonymous . . . force of modern times, the machine, could be made to produce [objects] . . . that were at once functional and beautiful. There had never been a show like it in any American fine arts museum." Johnson's enthusiasms were sudden and overpowering. "Hyperbole was catnip to Philip." Oud was "the world's greatest architect," Klee was "the greatest man" at the Bauhuas, Mies was "the greatest man I or we have met" and his Tugendhat House was "like the Parthenon," "without question the best-looking house in the world." Predictably, Johnson's disillusionments were equally sudden. One day Gropius "may be the greatest of them all," shortly thereafter he would become "the Warren G. Harding of architecture."

There was one enthusiasm, however, that persisted far too long. In 1932, Helen Appleton Read, art critic of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* and an avid admirer of Adolf Hitler, took Johnson with her to a Nazi rally outside Potsdam. It was a transformative experience: "totally febrile," Johnson recalled in the 1980s: "You simply could not fail to be caught up in the excitement of it." For Johnson, part of the thrill was sexual—"all those blond boys in black leather"—but there was also the political side: was this not Nietzsche's will to power in action? Mr. Schulze deals at some length with Johnson's flirtation with fascism in a section of his book called "The Inglorious Detour." It is not an edifying story. Johnson resigned from MOMA in 1934 in order to devote himself to his new-found passion. He wrote an admiring article on "Architecture and the Third Reich" for Lincoln Kirstein's magazine *Hound and Horn* in 1933 (Mr. Schulze later notes Johnson's "nagging quest for monumentality"), and indulged not infrequently in anti-Semitic rhetoric (e.g., in a letter to Barr, "the patrons of Mies are Jews and do we want them?"). He also became involved with several people who were later prosecuted for their Nazi connections during the war, most notably another Harvard alumnus, Lawrence Dennis. Together with Alan Blackburn, another classmate of his from Hackley and Harvard who was then on the staff at MOMA, Johnson attempted to start a new political party. The headline of a story by

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Joseph Alsop in the *Herald Tribune* summed it up: "Two Quit Modern Art Museum for Sur-Realist Political Venture."

Mr. Schulze suggests that Johnson's political activities were sparked partly by a "recurrence of some form of manic-depressive crisis." Perhaps. In any event, disappointed with their lack of success in starting a new political party, Johnson and Blackburn drove to Louisiana to offer their services to Huey Long. (Johnson said he was on his way to Louisiana to be Long's "Minister of Fine Arts.") Long sensibly refused to see them, but eventually a lieutenant told the persistent pair that they should go to Ohio and "organize it." Which is what they did, or attempted to do.

Soon thereafter, Long was assassinated, so Johnson was without a leader. The notoriously anti-Semitic Rev. Charles E. Coughlin, the "most sensational national radio personality of his day," soon stepped in to take Long's place. Johnson worked in several capacities for Coughlin, writing, designing a platform for a rally in Chicago, helping to organize supporters. When Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, Johnson was in Europe and was invited by the German propaganda ministry to accompany the Wehrmacht to the front. He sent back several dispatches for Coughlin's magazine *Social Justice*. In one dispatch, he complained that Britain and "aliens" were turning France into an English colony: "Lack of leadership and direction in the [French] state has let the one group get control who always gain power in a nation's time of weakness—the Jews." In other dispatches, he assured American readers that public perception of the Germans was all wrong: they really weren't the marauders people made them out to be. At the same time, he wrote enthusiastically in a letter that "we saw Warsaw burn and Modlin being bombed. It was a stirring spectacle." The emperor Nero could have hardly put it more bluntly. In an article called "*Mein Kampf* and the Business Man," which was published in the September 1939 issue of *The Examiner*, Johnson attacked "the liberals" and offered this apology for Hitler's racial ideas: "Hitler's 'racism' is a perfectly simple though far-reaching idea. It is the myth of 'we, the best,' which we find, more or less fully developed, in all vigorous cultures."

The basic story of Johnson's political activities, which came to an abrupt end in 1940 when he matriculated in the architecture school at Harvard, has been known for some time. Mr. Schulze adds a few inglorious details. What are we to make of it? Abby Aldrich Rockefeller infamously said about this protracted episode that "every young man should be allowed to make one large mistake." One wonders if she would feel the same way about Paul de Man or Martin Heidegger, both of whose early efforts on behalf of the Nazi cause have lately received so much attention.

For his part, Mr. Schulze engages in a fair amount of handwringing. He presents the facts, but then engages in a half-hearted attempt to rationalize them away. Johnson was swept away at the Potsdam rally, but, after all, his American citizenship and wealth allowed him to enjoy "the luxury of an interpretation," whatever that means. Indeed, Mr. Schulze is by inclination an admirably lucid writer, and whenever his prose grows muddy, one suspects it is because he is embarrassed about something. Attempting to explain Johnson's infatuation with National Socialism, he tells us that "whatever the irreducible core of Philip's personality, it lay beneath multiple layers of motivations manifest in an almost unnatural facility at the intermingling of activities and interests, not all of them discernibly consonant with one another." I am not sure what this means in English. In the end, Mr. Schulze comes close to doing an Abby Rockefeller: he does not quite excuse Johnson, but he concludes (with stunning understatement) that his actions, though "decidedly unheroic," merited "little more substantial attention than they have gained." Not everyone had been so forgiving. Naval intelligence and the FBI, for example, put together extensive dossiers on Johnson's activities, which, when he was

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drafted later in the war, prevented him from getting a number of preferred jobs. Still, all things considered, it is extraordinary how little Johnson's political activities hindered his career.

Mr. Schulze is generally less queasy in dealing with Johnson's work as an architect and public-relations man for architecture. He gives him due credit for his role in winning Mies the commission for the Seagram Building in the mid-1950s, and he is appropriately severe about Johnson's postmodernist edifices of the 1980s, noting that many of them "reveal a descent to the level of kitsch that appears less camp in its motivation than simply and unmitigatedly cheap in its effect." It is difficult to disagree. Harder to understand are some of Mr. Schulze's professed enthusiasms: for example, his claim that there is "something rather refreshing" about the so-called Lipstick Building in New York—a building that, whatever else can be said about it, certainly impresses most viewers as "cheap."

In the end, it must be said that Mr. Schulze gets the details about Philip Johnson right but that he misconstrues the picture he has assembled. Mr. Schulze several times alludes to Johnson's "classicist disposition," but his entire book is a casebook showing that Johnson's disposition is exactly the opposite. He is correct that Johnson came to treat "the history of building as one immense source book" for his ever more extravagant architectural fantasies, but he skirts the fact that such a predatory attitude toward history is deeply at odds with the settled conviction that marks the classical temper. Mies once famously said that "we don't invent a new architecture every Monday morning." In his post-Miesian phase, as Mr. Schulze points out, Johnson is a French classicist one moment, "then, without skipping a beat, a medieval castellator, and—next Monday morning, so to speak—a borrower from the Northern Renaissance." It may be the case that every second or third Monday Johnson wants a classical "look"; but such striving for effect is precisely the opposite of any serious classicism, whether practiced by Palladio or, indeed, by Mies van der Rohe. As Johnson's beloved Nietzsche observed in his criticism of another artist addicted to effects, what is meant to have the *effect* of truth cannot itself be true.

In a talk he gave in London in the early 1960s, Johnson made the following statement: "I studied philosophy as an undergraduate, instead of architecture. Perhaps that is why I have none now. I do not believe there is a consistent rationale or reason why one does things." This is typically Johnsonian both in its coy self-abasement and its implicit cynicism. Anyone who has looked into Johnson's career cannot help being struck by the uncanny fusion of wit and cynicism that he exhibits. He exudes charm, but it is a charm that conceals, barely, a deep-seated brutality. Johnson's declaration that he is "a whore" betrays one aspect of that brutality. Other aspects were evident in his enthusiasm for fascist ideology. Still another aspect was revealed to an interviewer shortly after his father died at the age of ninety-seven. "I didn't give a damn what my father wanted," Johnson said. "They [father and mother] were expendable. He wasn't any use in the world." Not for nothing, perhaps, did Bertrand Russell conclude that Johnson, albeit a "gentleman" and an amusing dinner companion, was at bottom "a diabolist."

Mr. Schulze speaks of Johnson's "love of beauty," claiming that it has consistently been a "unifying force" in his personality "provided it was free of message and he of the obligation to reflect on the message." But in fact the insistence on such "freedom" means that Johnson's relation to beauty, like his relation to truth, is fundamentally that of a parodist. His love of beauty is the chilly self-love of the confirmed aesthete. His message is that beauty is fine so long as it can be made interesting enough to be piquant; otherwise, ugliness has its attractions, too. A few years ago, Philip Johnson observed that postmodernism installed the giggle into architecture. He hasn't stopped laughing, but unfortunately the joke is on us.

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The legacy of Donald Francis Tovey

by James F. Penrose

What is new in the artistic spirit of revolt . . . is its bitterness and its universal range. . . . I may venture to assert that today it has, as it seldom had before, the aspect of a grievance. The mildest, and therefore perhaps the most serious form of the grievance, is that the load of classical tradition has long been so heavy as to repress further creative impulse. . . . What I do believe to be fundamentally wrong is every attitude towards Classical masterpieces that does not make them a stimulus instead of an oppression.
—D. F. Tovey, *Stimulus and the Classics of Music* (1914)

The nineteenth-century violinist Joseph Joachim thought that Donald Francis Tovey knew more about music than either Brahms or the Schumanns. Pablo Casals went one better by publicly acknowledging Tovey as one of the very greatest musicians of all time. The critic (and former bank clerk) Ernest Newman grudgingly admitted that Tovey's pianism was "in a class with Busoni." Which all goes to show that few things in life are more perishable than an artistic reputation.

Tovey's public career spanned the four decades from the death of Queen Victoria to the onset of the Second World War. He was a living example of the truth of Samuel Butler's tag that genius is the "supreme capacity for getting its possessors into trouble of all kinds and keeping them therein so long as the genius remains." Tovey's performances as a pianist and conductor were followed with polite consternation (by the musical public) and asperity (by the English critics). His recital programs were long and complex. Audiences accustomed to some nice preludes, a song-without-words or two, a sonata, and some waltzes were bludgeoned from their seats by Tovey's three-hour, five-sonata programs. There was no respite during intermissions: the pianist provided his own mammoth program notes (sometimes over a half-inch thick and over twenty-four thousand words long), replete with musical quotations, literary allusions, and an oddball sense of humor. After his appointment to the Reid Chair at the University of Edinburgh, Tovey founded his own orchestra and over the next twenty-four years transformed it into an important, if idiosyncratic, cultural resource. But public success was countered by abundant personal woe; his health deteriorated early, his first marriage dissolved with his wife's sanity, and he was forever harried by his teacher, Sophie Weisse.

There is little sense of repine, however, in his magnum opus, the six-volume *Essays in Musical Analysis* (1935–39), an exuberant and masterly commentary on the great and not-so-great works of the classical-music canon (a seventh volume was added posthumously, in 1944). This is his legacy, along with his eleven-odd other books and his superb performing editions of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* and the Beethoven piano sonatas and cello sonatas. Yet it is not the only legacy Tovey would have us treasure: he believed (with justification) that what he regarded as

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his greatest achievements, the opera *The Bride of Dionysus* and his massive Cello Concerto, were on the fast-track to obscurity.

Donald Francis Tovey (as he signed himself, even as a boy) was born at Eton on July 17, 1875, the second son of the Reverend Duncan Tovey and his formidably eccentric wife. Tovey's father was a noted classical scholar and entirely unmusical. One day, the Reverend mentioned to his son that it was strange that the archeologist Otto Jahn should have the same name as the author of a life of Mozart. When Donald mentioned that archeologist and author were one and the same, the old man contemptuously exclaimed: "Nonsense! A great scholar like Otto Jahn writing on such stuff as music! Impossible!" Donald was educated at Northlands, a school near Egham run by Sophie Weisse, a German emigrée. Miss Weisse recognized her five-year-old charge's talent when she heard him sight-sing Schubert's *Heidenröslein*, complete with modulations. Miss Weisse realized that her life's work was sitting on her lap: little Donald would have a great career and she would have little Donald, auxiliary rights and all.

No detail was spared in providing the child with the finest musical education in England. He was taught counterpoint by James Higgs and Sir Walter Parratt, composition by Sir Hubert Parry. Orchestras were rented for his conducting lessons. Christmas and Easter gifts for the eight-year-old were orchestral scores or volumes of piano music. Surprisingly, there is little evidence that the boy felt any distaste for this suffocating routine. At Northlands, Tovey was fussed over and cosseted ("like Achilles in Scyros," Edward Dent dourly noted), encouraging his already Learish traits: Fritz Busch was to comment on Tovey's "savage neglect of his clothes" and describe how Tovey would "lie his clothes on the floor so that in the morning he had only to slip back into them." By his nineteenth year, Tovey was already a seasoned recitalist and performer. His training was effectively finished by Brahms's great friend Joseph Joachim, who, until his death in 1907, regularly performed with the young man and introduced him to the greatest musicians of the time as their equal.

Donald Tovey matriculated at Balliol in 1894. Mythology notwithstanding, Oxford was hardly some exquisitely refined Athens-on-the-Cherwell. It better resembled the wild rowdiness of Scone College in Evelyn Waugh's *Decline and Fall*. Musicians were particularly favored targets. During one performance by the Holywell Orchestra, the first violinist's Cremona was destroyed by an orange. Notices were posted requesting that "dogs not be brought to the concerts." The shy and unpretentious Tovey was exempted from the musician-baiting, as he was much liked and admired by Oxford hell-raisers, who called him "The Tove"; Hilaire Belloc, Maurice Baring, and the Orientalist Denys Bray became his good friends. Tovey spent much of his time at Oxford composing and performing, but his preoccupation with these activities caused his examination results to suffer. Tovey took a Third in Greats in 1898 and retired both with his degree and a case of acute appendicitis. During his recovery, his nurse, Miss Weisse's mother, wrote frequently to her daughter to complain about Tovey's practice habits.

The Tovey trinity of pianist, composer, and writer made its debut in London with four long Thursday programs in November 1900. Tovey played Bach and Beethoven and accompanied members of the Kruse Quartet in his own Piano Trio, Piano Quartet, Piano Quintet, and Cello Sonata, among other works. Critical reception ranged, as it was to do for his entire career, from the ecstatic ("a new Schumann") to the derisory ("unconscionably dull"). Until the last years of his life Tovey's playing was described by the press as "cold" or "chilly," his *Essays* as "complex and obscure," and his compositions as the work of a man who knew too much about music to be a good composer, whatever that might mean. Tovey's performance style was indeed analytical, much like the performance styles of many of today's noteworthy pianists. In the Golden Age of

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pianism, however, when Paderewski's success was measured (according to one malicious critic) by the number of damp seats in the house, analysis wasn't good box office.

Tovey's compositions run to some forty opus numbers, though there are gaps in numbering and chronology. Strongly influenced by the Viennese, particularly Brahms, Tovey has a distinctive, lyric voice. This is evident as early as the *Balliol Dances*, op. 11, for piano duet, a delightful collection of waltzes dedicated to his tutor, Ernest Walker, and the pianist F. S. Kelly. The first five dances in the set date from Tovey's Oxford days while the remainder were composed sometime after; the work moves from youthful exuberance to a noble and touching conclusion. The Clarinet Sonata, op. 16, dating from 1906, is another lovely example of Tovey's youthful work and remained a favorite of the composer. The somber and controlled *Gluck Variations*, op. 28, composed in 1913 after a period of great crisis, are telling in their cool poignancy. The chamber works presented in his first London recitals are particularly impressive and were frequently performed by Mandyczewski and Busch.

Tovey's opera, *The Bride of Dionysus* (née *Ariadne*), took him over twenty years to bring to the stage. The opera moved the irascible Miss Weisse to new heights of indignation when she berated Tovey's collaborator, the poet Robert Trevelyan (who had finished *his* part of the job years before), for writing a useless libretto "and ruining all Donald's work." Though Fritz Busch admired the work and scheduled it for revival at Glyndebourne in 1940, those plans were stilled by the war and the opera has remained silent to this day. The Cello Concerto, which was written for Pablo Casals, and the Piano Concerto have fallen into desuetude. Casals once recorded the Cello Concerto, and despite its deficient sonic quality, the recording shows the nobility and pathos of the work. Unpublished or long out of print, these works deserve their posthumous certificates of rehabilitation.

During the first ten years of the century, Tovey's musical schedule became progressively more frantic. He added to his extensive teaching and performance commitments by acting as performer and organizer for three annual series of subscription concerts. He was also commissioned to write the musical articles for the legendary eleventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. The pace of his activities caused him to be often ill with stress and overwork. In his mid-thirties, Tovey began to show a certain quirk of personality, peculiar for one constitutionally so kind and understanding—an opaque insensitivity. In its mildest form, this could be rather endearing. When the visiting Ernest Walker asked Tovey for some bedtime reading, he was handed a volume of the *Bach Gesellschaft*. Though Tovey had been Fritz Busch's houseguest for six months, he was astonished to hear that Mrs. Busch was about to give birth. Sir Henry Wood remarked that after a long and tiring recital which finished with the arduous first book of Brahms's *Paganini Variations*, Tovey misread the warmth of his departing audience's applause as he sat down and played through Book Two.

Its virulent form produced less amusing results. Tovey discarded friends who criticized Miss Weisse, and trivial matters frequently provoked violent outbursts of temper. Tovey also appeared to have difficulty sensing when his interest in the opposite sex was not returned. But his greatest misadventure occurred when he insinuated himself into the Casals–Suggia *ménage* in 1912.

Two years after Joachim's death, Tovey was still bereft when his friend Edward Speyer introduced him to Pablo Casals in October 1909. In Casals, Tovey found Joachim's spiritual and artistic avatar. The two were soon performing throughout Europe, often playing Tovey's music. At the time, Casals was co-habiting with the Portuguese cellist Guilhermina Suggia, who is sometimes quaintly described as his "common-law wife." But in 1912, when the three were on holiday together in Spain, something happened. Suggia "played with fire . . .

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and certainly Tovey showed that unhappy lack of *Menschenkenntnis* which Miss Weisse had long deplored," wrote Tovey's pupil and biographer, Mary Grierson, in marvelously elliptical fashion.[1] Casals threw Suggia out of the house and Tovey's pathetically inept attempts to heal the breach resulted in the two men being estranged for over a decade. To round the month out, Tovey's father suddenly died. The pianist canceled his performances for the rest of the year, broke from Miss Weisse, and left England for Aix, where he was to remain until 1914.

War and an unexpected academic vacancy drew Tovey back to Britain. Over Miss Weisse's forcibly expressed disapproval, Tovey applied for the Reid Professorship at the University of Edinburgh and was awarded the position in July 1914, less than a month after his application. Two years later he married, again to thunderous tirades from Miss Weisse. The marriage, however, was a disaster. Unknown to Tovey, his bride-to-be was mentally unstable, and soon after the marriage she began frequently commuting across the borderline of sanity. Mrs. Tovey's behavior produced certain sympathetic vibrations in her husband; in 1920, Tovey composed a three-part song called *The Mad Maiden's Song* and later became enamored of a bizarre and ponderous instrument called the Moor Coupler Duplex Piano, on which he played duets with himself. He spent hours with this monstrosity and arranged to give a recital on the instrument at Oxford, which was only canceled when the instrument could not be delivered to the hall. Pictures of Tovey around the time show a shocking change from the handsome if somewhat shambling figure of the mid-Teens to the drawn and staring vision he had become by his divorce in 1922.

Though he commented acidly and often on its musical climate, Tovey found something of a niche in Edinburgh. His academic schedule permitted him time to concertize and compose while the didacticism that so bewildered his hapless London audiences bore fruit in the teaching of two generations of students and in the creation and nurturing of the Reid Orchestra. The Reid served as Tovey's musical laboratory, not so much for his own works but for the investigation and display of those compositions that Tovey thought truly mattered. The program notes for many of those works were to be eventually collected in six slim blue volumes as the *Essays in Musical Analysis*.

Despite their impeccably dry and forbidding title, the *Essays* contain some of the wittiest and most captivating writing ever done on musical subjects. That includes the famously amusing Berlioz of the *Memoirs*, whom Tovey flicks aside by remarking that while Berlioz is good reading, "we need not go to him for information about anything but his own state of mind as he would like us to conceive it." Tovey is perpetually at pains to remind us that the *Essays* were born to the practical function of enlightening his conservative and suspicious Edinburgh audience, not fond of surprises, less fond of innovation, and least fond of all of parting with the coin-of-the-realm to fund the cost of more horn and wind players and rehearsal time, all of which the Reid so desperately needed.

While the *Essays* are ostensibly grouped by genre, Tovey is the first to admit the informal nature of his divisions. The symphonic form is treated in its classical examples in Volume I and in the first half of Volume II. The remainder of the second volume deals with symphonic variations and orchestral polyphony (chiefly Bach). Volume III divides its discussion of the concerto between classical works based on the *ritornello* (orchestral introduction)—chiefly the Mozart concerti—and the variation-based works descended from the Mendelssohn E-minor Violin Concerto. Volume IV, "Illustrative Music," is a collection of studies (often extremely amusing) of Romantic-period program music, while Volume V deals with

1 Grierson's hagiographical *Donald Francis Tovey* (Oxford University Press, 1950) remains the standard life of Tovey.

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vocal music and Volume VI rounds out with "Miscellaneous Works." The subject of the seventh volume is chamber music and deals with the *Goldberg Variations*, the *Art of Fugue*, the *Diabelli Variations*, and other kings-of-the-road.

It is not giving too much of the plot away to reveal that Tovey considered Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, and Brahms to be at the center of his musical solar system. The other forty-five composers treated in the *Essays* orbit around this central cluster, with Berlioz being somewhere past Jupiter and Saint-Saëns being the musical equivalent of Pluto. Though Tovey may frown upon technical shortcomings, the inclusion of a work in his exclusive club belies any rough justice meted out. Tovey's principles of selection and evaluation are straightforward and apparent, and while it is unfair to attempt to summarize those principles in a sentence, the reader of the *Essays* will quickly become aware of Tovey's interest in how structure and technique operate effectively to direct dramatic flow. Tovey was the last, however, to insist on form for its own sake; his teacher, Parry, insisted that Tovey analyze works "point to point" and not ever to fit the work to Procrustean principles of construction.

The fact that relatively few twentieth-century composers are featured in the *Essays* has been held against Tovey as evidence of some form of critical arteriosclerosis. Certainly Stravinsky, Prokofiev, and Bartók are not discussed in the *Essays*, though half of the composers featured there were Tovey's contemporaries. If anything, this statistic suggests Tovey to be at least as progressive as many present-day music directors and conductors who are firmly rooted in the works of bygone days. Moreover, those alleging arrested development overlook the fact that certain of Tovey's favorites, like Bruckner and even Brahms, were by no means as popular then as they are today; others, like Röntgen, Voormolen, and Zador, are even now still largely unknown. Tovey used the *Essays* to justify the quixotic task of keeping his subject works in the repertory. He called himself "counsel for the defense."

Tovey reminds us several times that the *Essays* contained no modern works because of his rather limited resources in Edinburgh; indeed, he would not conduct Mahler's works for years precisely because of the technical weaknesses of the Reid. Strauss's works are difficult for they "bristle with technical abnormalities" not made easier as Strauss "drives through his musical traffic like a road hog." Production of highly complex, non-traditional works like *The Rite of Spring* or Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra was far beyond the resources of an orchestra limited to weekly six-hour rehearsals. Of course, to those so inclined, the *Essays* may be read as a reactionary, rear-guard movement against the Moderns. Others might find it excessively critical to fault Tovey for his silence rather than for what he did in fact say. Certainly Debussy, Holst, Sibelius, and Vaughan Williams had no cause for complaint.

Volume I starts out with Tovey's somewhat disingenuous ground rules. He says that the *Essays* are "certainly not designed for continuous reading"—but nobody, as used to be said in another context, can read just one. "Nor . . . can [they] pass for a work of reference"—yet Tovey scrutinizes a vast range of compositions. He insists the *Essays* are not a complete system of criticism—though even during his lifetime Tovey epigones quoted him as the ultimate critical authority. Tovey wrote most of the *Essays* spontaneously, and he impishly admits that he owes a debt of gratitude to that "most emancipating intellectual maxim of our times, viz. *History is what you remember*."

Brahms, Haydn, Mozart, Schubert, and Mendelssohn are all discussed in Volume I, but pride of place goes to Beethoven. Tovey's *précis*-form description in Volume I of Beethoven's Symphony no. 9 in D Minor blooms into a forty-five-page exposition in Volume II. Like most of the *Essays*, this study divides into a prefatory commentary followed by a musical description. Tovey begins with a description of the origins of the Ninth Symphony and captures our attention

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with the intriguing speculation that, had Beethoven survived the chill that eventually killed him, the choral writing of the last movement would have ignited a fourth developmental period in Beethoven's output "distinguished by a body of choral work fully equal in power and perfection to the symphonies and string quartets." Tovey then treats us to some of his most serious and striking writing when he addresses the subject of time in music as the correlative of size in architecture. Tovey explains that one of the greatest features of that great symphony is Beethoven's conjuring up in a very few bars the impression of immense size and distance through proportion in time and scale of tone. (This same sensitivity to Time and Space is also evident in Tovey's treatment of Schubert's C-Major Symphony.) Tovey then provides an expansive description of each movement, saving his best for the Finale. "In the Ninth Symphony, Beethoven's plan is to remind us of the first three movements . . . and to reject them one by one as failing to attain the joy in which he believes." The structural complexities of the Ninth Symphony are handled with masterly ease and lightness, and Tovey's unabashed admiration and affection for the work are apparent.

In Volume II, Tovey's remarks on Schumann's B-flat Major Symphony, op. 38 (the "*Spring*"), show his benevolent understanding of that composer. "It may safely be said that no orchestra ever earned its reputation by its interpretation of Schumann. . . . As for a brilliant performance, that would be an outrage on Schumann's holiest intimacy. . . . The inner content of this music is a perpetual springtime of youthful enthusiasm; the externals are robed in an old dressing gown and carpet-slippers amid thick clouds of tobacco smoke." We also see his sense of humor at its most donnish: "When Shakespeare called springtime 'the only pretty ringtime' he obviously referred to Schumann's happy use of the triangle in the lighter passages."

Volume III is perhaps the densest of the set with its introductory study on the Classical Concerto. Here we see Tovey in overdrive as he first delineates the structural distinctions between the classical symphony and the classical concerto, then leads us to an analysis of the concerto form itself beginning with a most arresting image: "Nothing in human life or history is as thrilling or of more ancient or unusual experience than the antithesis of the individual and the crowd; an antithesis . . . which has been of no less universal prominence in works of art than in life." Tovey takes the form back to the arias of Alessandro Scarlatti and shows us how the form developed "as the contrast of a single voice and the chorus of instruments." In all, some forty-six works are discussed in Volume III, divided between the ritornello-based classical form and the more modern variation-based type. In his study of the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto, Tovey, like the rest of us, shows the adaptability of a good line when he recycles a witticism ("as ascribed by a Master of Balliol to the British schoolboy") made in his edition of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*: "no nonsense is too enormous to be a possible translation from a classical author."

For some, the best way to go about reading the *Essays* may be to start with Tovey's dislikes rather than his enthusiasms. Tovey's other side, that of the acid, take-on-all-comers, take-no-prisoners stylist, is nowhere more apparent than in his treatment in Volume IV of Berlioz's *Harold in Italy*, based on Byron's *Childe Harold*.

Matters get off to a brisk start. "There are excellent reasons for reading *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*," writes Tovey airily, "but among them I cannot find any that concern Berlioz . . . except for the jejune value of the discovery that no definite elements of Byron's poem have penetrated the impregnable fortress of Berlioz's encyclopedic inattention." After a few remarks about the random nature of the *idée fixe*, he cocks the gun by innocently describing an instrumental technique pioneered in the youthful *Rob Roy*, which Berlioz claimed to have had burnt. Then Tovey starts shooting in earnest: "In

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Berlioz's vocabulary 'burnt' means carefully preserved, so that an admiring posterity can discover evidence of the truth of Oscar Wilde's assertion that a true artist lives in a series of masterpieces in which no progress whatever can be discerned." It doesn't stop there, either.

But rehabilitation is not long in coming; Tovey's reservations about Berlioz the man are softened by his opinion about Berlioz the composer. "But—and this is a very big but—Berlioz, whose genius for ornamentation has always been recognized, also had a genius for composition. Two causes have prevented the recognition of this: first, that he notoriously failed to learn anything his masters tried to teach him; and, secondly, that almost everything they tried to teach him was wrong." Though Berlioz "cannot develop a theme [but] only submit it to a process aptly described . . . as 'rabbeting,'" Tovey admits that the process bears excellent results. What is the secret of Berlioz's success? "He is a born perorator, and everything leads up to his perorations. But notice that everything does genuinely lead up to them; he does not perorate upon a vacuum. He cannot argue, he cannot meditate . . . But he can sum up and pile on the agony or the exultation." Tovey then proceeds to a movement-by-movement description of *Harold*, citing and commenting upon characteristic themes and embroidering the whole with his wry commentary. Then, as now, Tovey's irreverence to their hero caused Berliozians no small degree of ire, but Tovey, excellent counsel that he is, seldom gets into a hole he can't get out of: "He is big enough to stand our poking a little fun at him; and I am sorry if the out-and-out Berliozians are not."

Volume VI begins with a highly interesting study on "Linear Harmony." The range of the rest of the volume is astonishing, especially when it is noted that much of the material that Tovey discusses was not then available on record. Much, in fact, is still not. The volume begins to close with a highly amusing essay on "Wagner in the Concert Room," which addresses the "bloody chunks" problem confronted by conductors performing extracts from Wagner's operas. The penultimate chapter, "Retrospect and Corrigenda," is a characteristic blend of the genial, the grave, and the waspish as Tovey admits to a fault, embellishes a point—or drives one home. He signs off to his critics with a shrug: "Peace be to their waste-paper baskets and to mine."

Throughout the Thirties, Tovey was in failing health, with an unreliable heart and with gouty hands that made playing stretches miserable even when possible. He had suffered at least two heart attacks when the violinist Jelly d'Aranyi, Joachim's niece and Tovey's old friend, approached Tovey with a most peculiar story. Miss d'Aranyi said that while attending a séance given in London by Baron Erik Palmstierna, the spirit of Robert Schumann appeared and told her (in mangled German) that it was his personal wish that she play his Violin Concerto. Tovey's reputation was such in those days that it extended to the hereafter, for when the nonplused Miss d'Aranyi replied that she knew of no such concerto, the spirit told her to ask Tovey about it, which she did. Joachim had once told Tovey about the work and the decision of Clara Schumann, Brahms, and Joachim not to publish it because of its apparently uneven merit. The unpublished score was retrieved from its resting place in the State Library in Berlin per additional spiritual directions. Schumann apparently had further thoughts on his manuscript, for at the next séance he directed Miss d'Aranyi to rework parts of the solo writing, which she again did with both Schumann's and Tovey's approval. "Who did this? It is excellent. It is altogether Schumannesque!" said Tovey, in tones resembling the Reverend Collins. For all of the gravity of the matter, as reported in Palmstierna's book *Horizons of Immortality*, the non-musical world was irreverent, but Tovey would not give an inch. "I assert my positive conviction that the spirit of Schumann is inspiring Jelly d'Aranyi's production of Schumann's posthumous Violin Concerto. The sense in which I make this assertion is my

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own private affair," he barked in a letter to *The Times*.

In June 1939, around the time Volume VI of the *Essays* was published, Tovey wrote to Mary Grierson, saying that "the ground got up and hit me on the nose." He was admitted to Westminster Hospital in London in July, but was evacuated for war reasons back to his country house at Hedenham in Suffolk, far away from bombardment in London and far away from medical help. He died on July 10, 1940, a week before his sixty-fifth birthday.

We read Tovey for his exposition, for his beautiful Austenian prose, but above all for his intuition and musical judgments. His genius was to convey through the written word the fleeting and magical impressions that music, that most evanescent of arts, evokes. Tovey succeeded brilliantly because he understood both the limitations of criticism and his own abilities as a musician. In aspiring not to scholasticism but to art, Tovey conjures up in us the brief, hair-raising sensation of greatness—not just of the subject work, but also, quite possibly, of his own writing. The result is that the *Essays in Musical Analysis* are among the greatest collections of writings on music.

Jean Sibelius once remarked that no one ever raised a statue to a critic. The most famous critic of all, Eduard Hanslick, is notorious for the magnitude of his gaffe in viewing Wagner as a destructive influence in Western music. In this century, Ernest Newman, Tovey's nemesis, sought with others to establish a system of scientific criticism, grounded in quasi-scientific principles, seeking to bring some sort of objectivity to the art of criticism. None of these men have their statues, and quite probably none of them ever shall. Donald Tovey, on the other hand, realized that criticism, like the music it seeks to understand, is an art form, and that good criticism is just as indefinable and just as real as good music. Until the City of Edinburgh gets around to erecting Tovey's statue, the *Essays in Musical Analysis* will serve as a very nice monument indeed.

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F. Scott Fitzgerald & the magical glory

by James W. Tuttleton

The death of eighty-one-year-old Caitlin Thomas this past summer dredged up, from forgotten depths of my memory, a good many images of the wild and drunken life of her husband, Dylan, whose rollicking verse and booming recitation so much enchanted my cloistered youth. They were an immensely flamboyant couple who lived with wild abandon, and their lunatic shenanigans mesmerized a great many aspiring poets and ambitious literary youth in those years. Hardly a week went by, it seemed, without a new account in *Time* of that couple's gaudy and gross public naughtiness.

Less beguiling, though, was the melancholy public spectacle that Thomas began to make of himself in the early 1950s, during his several reading tours in America. Thomas on tour was all too often drunk on the platform, openly lewd at social events, and rude beyond belief to his disillusioned admirers. A number of the recent obituaries that undertook to account for the now mostly forgotten couple cited Caitlin's confession that their story was "not a love story proper" but "more of a drink story," since "without the first-aid of drink it could never have got onto its rocking feet":

> In those long-ago, wrongly romanticized, deliberately mad (they were deliberately mad), absolutely unpardonable days, our primary aim was to get ourselves noticed at any cost: to show off like crazies to gain attention. So we used shock tactics. We knew only too well that it is much easier and quicker to get oneself noticed in a bad light. It was essential to give people a legend.

What seems evident is that the Thomases had taken a leaf from the legend of the F. Scott Fitzgeralds. For Scott and Zelda were doubtless the first literary couple to realize that notoriety in America is merely a form of publicity, that publicity is indistinguishable from celebrity, and that even notoriety attained through scandal can still be instantly turned into wealth, fame, and power. "Hard Copy," "A Current Affair," and "Inside Edition" are three dismally popular television programs that—under the pretext of bringing us news that the network anchors simply don't have time for—blur the distinction between "stunts" that merely call attention to the publicity-hungry egotists who perform them and true distinction worthy of public attention or admiration. And so long as the American public is avid for such sensationalism, there will always be a market for books about people like the Thomases and the Fitzgeralds. After all, don't we think it's daring, risqué, and wonderfully spontaneous and uninhibited when celebrity couples get drunk and dance on the restaurant table or plunge into the fountain at the Plaza Hotel?

A century ago such escapades would have been silently omitted from our literary biographies. It was customary in the age of Mrs. Grundy to recognize that, while artists

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had "weaknesses," these were best excluded from biography in the interest of public morals and the sensibilities of the children and surviving relatives. The older family-authorized two-volume *Life and Letters of*... (of the kind specialized in by the indefatigable M. A. DeWolfe Howe) rarely brought a blush to the cheek of the genteel reader. But the attack on Mrs. Grundy by the Shieks and Flappers of the 1920s—the assault on public morals as mere hypocrisy by Flaming Youth—was almost instantly signaled by a shift in biography-writing as well. The eminent Victorians (and our other predecessors) were now to be debunked, exposed as frauds, and shown up as hypocrites. Even writers who had apparently led exemplary lives were now to be stripped of their "transparent defense mechanisms" and, à la Freud, revealed to be repressed, frustrated, and neurotic. "Modern writers" who were not repressed, frustrated, and neurotic but who gave open expression to impulse and acted out their infantile desires in public were acclaimed as free, natural, and uninhibited, somehow psychologically "healthier" than their uptight elders. And the odd antics of *les jeunes* were regularly celebrated in the press. Indeed, the media even conspired to induce the craziness, to feed the frenzy for scandal, and to convince us, all the while, that mere audacity equals genius.

Nearly a decade ago, in taking up James R. Mellow's *Invented Lives: F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald* (1985), Sonya Rudikoff, writing in these pages, expressed the fear that Mellow might offer us yet "another promotion, or another hagiography, another recital of the romanticizing litany which tries once again to proffer an image and enthrall us." He did not. The dismal facts of the Fitzgeralds' lives were already well known. Arthur Mizener's biography, *The Far Side of Paradise* (1951), had not concealed at all the grimmer implications of Fitzgerald's alcoholism and Zelda's madness. In fact, Hemingway—protective in later life of Scott's reputation and the feelings of his daughter, Scottie—was so incensed at Mizener's revelations that he called Mizener a grave robber who deserved to be "hanged, head down, in front of any second-rate garage." Hemingway told Malcolm Cowley that knocking off Mizener would be "a sound thing": "I would like to kill him if it is O.K."

But, somehow, the squalor of the Fitzgeralds' lives does not seem to remain in the mind as clearly as the transcendental romanticism of their lyrical courtship and the uninhibited gaiety of their notorious but loving marriage. Then too, affecting our perception, there are those gaudy, beguiling movies—like *The Great Gatsby* with Robert Redford or Alan Ladd—where Tom and Daisy and Gatsby step down from the slick stylish pages of the old *Vanity Fair* and ride about in a colorful old Rolls-Royce convertible. It hardly mattered that the movies were trash and sunk in a false nostalgia. Still we are left with the recurrent image of enchantment—as in the biographies of Andrew Turnbull and Sheilah Graham): The Glamour of the Spontaneous Talented Beautiful People—Scott and Zelda.

It is my impression that—in the decade or so since Ms. Rudikoff expressed this concern over the romantic falsification of the Fitzgeralds' life—the literary situation has changed. Lately we have been getting not the good, the bad, and the ugly, but just the ugly. So many recent literary biographies have turned out to be hatchet jobs that Joyce Carol Oates has reproachfully coined the term "pathography": the life that emphasizes the vice, evil, or illnesses of the author. Readers are thought nowadays to want only stories of the writer's drink and dissipation, the sexual hang-ups, the domestic meanness and madness. At least that is what we seem to be mostly getting now.

These reflections are partly spurred by a number of recent books about Scott, Zelda, and their fiction,[1] books that raise anew the

1 The books under consideration is this review include *Scott Fitzgerald: A Biography*, by Jeffrey Meyers (HarperCollins, 400 pages, $27.50); *F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Life in Letters*, edited by Matthew J. Bruccoli with the assistance of Judith S. Baughman

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question of how we are meant to understand the public and private lives of writers in America and the relationship between biography and the fiction that grows out of it.

Certainly with Jeffrey Meyers's *Scott Fitzgerald: A Biography*, Sonya Rudikoff's fear need no longer be entertained. There is nothing hagiographic or promotional whatsoever about this life. It is a pathography of character flaws and debilitating vices so detailed and appalling that we wonder how Fitzgerald still manages to interest us a half-century after his death. It can in all fairness be said that Jeffrey Meyers is a practiced hand at discovering the imperfection of his subjects. A Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, he has already written lives of Katherine Mansfield, Wyndham Lewis, Ernest Hemingway, D. H. Lawrence, Joseph Conrad, Edgar Allan Poe, and Robert Lowell and his circle (the suicidal poets Plath, Jarrell, Berryman, et al.). For Meyers there is a talent which it were death to hide—and worse, damnation to destroy. And if Providence doesn't damn quickly enough, Meyers is ready to step in and announce the execration of the writer. He is appalled at genius shattered by its own hand and literary brilliance brought low by its own connivances. He is ruthless in his portrait of the writer's slide from inebriated high spirits into the vomit of drink, by the spectacle of drug- or self-induced mental derangement, by the cost to the literary life of true madness unrecognized by critics and friends. It is fair to say that he loves literature but hates the self-destructive or lunatic behavior of writers that is so much celebrated and solicited by a literary public ravenous for scandal.

Meyers quotes, with surprising complacency, the novelist Jay McInerney's view that Matthew "Bruccoli's *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, Mellow's peevish, sordid *Invented Lives*, as well as Scott Donaldson's folksy psychoanalysis in *A Fool for Love*, . . . Arthur Mizener's excellent and grim *The Far Side of Paradise*, Andrew Turnbull's biographical memoir *Scott Fitzgerald* and Nancy Milford's feminist revisionist *Zelda*," fail to give "the sense of a coherent personality." Meyers thinks that he has the key and sees his own work as "more analytic and interpretive" than the work of his predecessors and more elucidative of "the recurrent patterns that reveal [Fitzgerald's] inner self." But mostly what he presents to us is the clinical evidence for Fitzgerald's manifest inferiority complex, his drunken binges, his nocturnal sweats, his sleeping pills, the couple's sexual dysfunction, their mutual infidelities, Zelda's growing madness and confinement in mental hospitals, the *delirium* produced by the daily quart of gin (or the thirty-seven bottles of beer a day when he wanted to "cut down"), his chronic money problems, and his well-publicized alcoholic crack-up. In reducing Fitzgerald's life to this litany of disasters, Meyers does paraphrase, along the way, the writer's major novels and stories, linking them to the personal drama of these two collapsing individuals. A kind of coherence is certainly attained by this method, but it leaves the reader who is appreciative of Fitzgerald's fiction in a state of moral dismay.

At the age of fifteen, at the Newman Academy, Scott Fitzgerald composed this self-description:

> *First:* Physically—I marked myself handsome; of great athletic *possibilities*, and an extremely good dancer. . . . *Second:* Socially . . . I was convinced that I had personality, charm, magnetism, poise, and the ability to dominate others. Also I was sure that I exercised a subtle fascination over women. *Third:* Mentally . . . I was vain of having so much, of being so talented ingenious and quick to learn. . . . Generally—I knew that at bottom I lacked the essentials. At the last crisis, I knew I had no real courage, perseverance or self-respect.

This is a shrewd piece of self-analysis, especially in regard to his defects. But, unfor-

(Scribner's, 503 pages, $30); *Fitzgerald and Hemingway: A Dangerous Friendship*, by Matthew J. Bruccoli (Carroll & Graf, 236 pages, $21.95); and *The Great Gatsby and Modern Times*, by Ronald Berman (University of Illinois Press, 197 pages, $24.95).

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tunately, nearly all the virtues that he claimed for himself are exaggerations. The fact is that while Fitzgerald *was* a talented, charming, handsome young man, he was—more important to his sense of himself—a poor, provincial, deeply insecure, intellectually inferior, and socially outmatched boy and man at the St. Paul and Newman academies, at Princeton, and afterward.

At Princeton he felt himself to be a Midwestern nobody in the expensive company of rich Easterners. He did not have the intellectual drive to master his studies, and tried to make it on talent alone, writing and acting for the Triangle and soliciting the literary life in New York. But he was dropped for poor scholarship, and ever afterward his classmate Edmund Wilson was, to him, the intellectual he could never be; John Peale Bishop was the poet he never could become; and Hemingway was the successful writer he should like to have been. Matthew Arnold had said that the English Romantic poets were long on feeling and short on knowledge: they didn't know enough. Something like that has often been said of Fitzgerald. In fact he said it of himself: "If I knew anything I'd be the best writer in America." Even so, much of the time, he knew just enough about the worlds of his stories to make them come alive.

Was he fascinating to women? A number of women were drawn to Fitzgerald, but he was full of class anxieties and sexual dread. He had early on been summarily rejected by both Ginevra King and Zelda Sayre, the two golden girls in his personal mythology of unattainable love, largely because of his poverty and marginal prospects. The moral of the Ginevra King episode, as her father taught him, was that "poor boys shouldn't think of marrying rich girls." And only after the success of *This Side of Paradise* did Zelda consent, finally, to marry him. The whole experience of social marginality and romantic rejection, if it did not traumatize him for life, became the master theme of his fiction.

Yet, for all of Fitzgerald's enchanting love stories in which the handsome and talented outsider longs for the beautiful golden girl, the wild and self-destructive Fitzgerald in fact exhibits a twisted suspicion of women, especially of beautiful women, and a deep hostility to the lure of the beautiful and to aesthetics itself. This is most evident in *This Side of Paradise* (1920), where Amory Blaine, a transparent self-portrait, reflects on the various young women to whom he has given himself away—Rosalind, Isabelle, and Eleanor Savage:

> The problem of evil had solidified for Amory into the problem of sex. . . . Inseparably linked with evil was beauty—beauty, still a constant rising tumult; soft in Eleanor's voice, in an old song at night, rioting deliriously through life like superimposed waterfalls, half rhythm, half darkness. Amory knew that every time he had reached toward it longingly it had leered out at him with the grotesque face of evil. Beauty of great art, beauty of all joy, most of all the beauty of women.

Fitzgerald's anxiety about the evil somehow hidden in the web that entangles women, beauty, and sex is played out in story after story, and in the major novels *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922), *The Great Gatsby* (1925), and *Tender Is the Night* (1934). In these novels Fitzgerald's heroines invariably decline from belle to flirt to vamp to the lamia or vampire herself. From Gloria Gilbert and Daisy Fay to Nicole Diver, as Matthew J. Bruccoli's huge but unreadable *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur* shows, Fitzgerald's fiction continually rewrites the story of the sad young man who is drained and depleted of his very energy and vitality by a destructive *belle dame sans merci.*

Bruccoli has the instinct of a collector but no literary taste and seems to publish two or three books a year on Fitzgerald, and to him we owe every last laundry list of the novelist that has found its way into print. Examining his two latest productions, one feels a dismal sense of *déjà vu* and a deep suspicion that Bruccoli's principal vocation is pasting together, out of various materials, titles that will simply make money. *F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Life in Letters* and *Fitzgerald and Heming-*

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way: A Dangerous Friendship both feature recycled material from Bruccoli's own previous books or those of his betters. Virtually all of Fitzgerald's important letters were long ago published by biographers like Andrew Turnbull or critics like John Kuehl and Jackson Bryer, the editors of the excellent *Dear Scott/Dear Max: The Fitzgerald–Perkins Correspondence.* But although these editions were handy enough, Bruccoli and Margaret M. Duggan assembled the huge *Correspondence of F. Scott Fitzgerald* in 1980, which included letters *to* Fitzgerald, as well as his own doodling, drawings, and other trivia. I do not know why, after the *Correspondence*, Bruccoli and Charles Scribner III felt that we needed another major edition of the letters, but in his introduction to this new volume he claims that the "abundance of evidence" already available "in the published collections of Fitzgerald's letters" is "inconvenient for general readers" and so warrants a new collection. But we are not told whether there are any new letters here not already in print, and readers should be aware that the slant in this current volume is entirely autobiographical (hence the subtitle "A Life in Letters"), a limitation, if that's what it is, that Bruccoli seems to lay at the feet of Scribner.

In *Fitzgerald and Hemingway: A Dangerous Friendship*, Bruccoli expands his *Scott and Ernest: The Authority of Failure and the Authority of Success* of 1978. That was a book about the writers' friendship that Bruccoli prematurely rushed into print before Hemingway's letters had been edited or published, before they could even be quoted. Moreover, he writes, "At that time I conceived the bad idea of writing the book without footnotes. This experiment in 'reader-friendly' scholarship did not result in a best seller, but it did result in a book with limited usefulness. Biography without documentation is a species of fiction." Few will disagree that the first book was of limited usefulness. About this current one all that can be said is that, in the intervening seventeen years, the news has become stale. We have here an account of a friendship mainly illuminated by quoting letters that, in the interim, have become readily available elsewhere, a friendship rather exhaustively treated, moreover, in biographies of Hemingway by Kenneth Lynn, Peter Griffith, Michael Reynolds, and others. Bruccoli calls the friendship "dangerous." And, in the sense that Fitzgerald shamefully abased himself before a writer he considered his superior (provoking Hemingway's contempt for this unmanly weakness), the friendship did cost Fitzgerald a great deal of pain. But was Hemingway, ipso facto, a dangerous friend? James R. Mellow's splendid *Hemingway: A Life without Consequences* (1992) gives us a wealth of testimony from Hemingway's male friends to suggest otherwise. In any case, I doubt whether this book will be the best seller Bruccoli seems annually in search of, for even this new account of the friendship must be called premature and, by his own standards, fictional.

In explaining why Bruccoli's new book will not be the definitive account of this friendship, I must turn to the sexuality of both writers and therefore open up a matter that would have been unmentionable material to biographers a century ago—or even perhaps seventeen years ago. How can I put this? A number of critics nowadays claim that the friendship of Hemingway and Fitzgerald cannot be understood apart from Zelda's claim that Scott had a minuscule penis, that his friend Hemingway was "a pansy with hair on his chest," and that the two of them were in fact homosexual lovers. Of course Zelda was utterly mad when she made this claim, for which there is no evidence whatsoever. But Hemingway reported in *A Moveable Feast* that Fitzgerald asked him for reassurance about the size of his equipment, which was said to endure Hemingway's ocular examination in the men's room of a bar in Paris. Hemingway said that Scott was perfectly normal and that the "castrating" Zelda had said it merely to put him out of business. Bruccoli remarks that this episode is unprecedented in American literary history, as indeed it is. But Jeffrey Meyers is not content simply to ques-

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tion its veracity. (Eighteen times in the text Hemingway calls *A Moveable Feast* "fiction.") Meyers pursues the matter to grotesque lengths, adducing Sheilah Graham's own measurement and confirmation: Fitz was large enough for all practical female purposes and pleasurable enough in the sack. I submit that we have come to a freakish point in American biography, in the development of American culture itself, when arguments are conducted in public by supposedly serious biographers, scholars even, about the size and satisfactoriness of a writer's penis.

Whatever we may think about this academic bobbitry, however, Bruccoli has not really given us the definitive account of the Hemingway–Fitzgerald relationship. Why? Because the manuscript of *A Moveable Feast* has three canceled sections with Fitzgerald material, chapters that cannot be reprinted, reproduced, or even quoted. Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin tried to reprint them in her excellent study *Ernest Hemingway's "A Moveable Feast": The Making of Myth* (1991), but Hemingway's literary estate refused permission. Bruccoli did not get permission either. And we will just have to wait until some future scholar can reprint what exactly Hemingway wrote about this friend that he subsequently canceled. In the meantime, it is doubtful that Bruccoli, the stylist who committed the following sentences to public inspection, will ever write anything definitive or produce a best seller:

> The most important thing about Fitzgerald—about any writer—is his writing. The playboy image that has attached itself like fungus to Fitzgerald's reputation obscures the proper assessment of his genius. Because Fitzgerald is regarded as "a natural"—a misleading claim made by civilians—his literary intelligence has been impugned. These letters amply demonstrate that when Fitzgerald wrote about literature, even informally, he wrote with the authority of a professional who had mastered his craft.

I don't know who these "civilians" are, but I am sure that Fitzgerald would have been appalled at the fungus simile and is turning over in his grave because his letters have been reproduced here with all of their many, many, *many* illiterate spelling errors intact.

The collapse of the Stock Market in 1929, initiating the Depression, sensitized virtually every American writer to new disparities between wealth and poverty. And a great many of the merely sentimental authors were radicalized as well. Meyers, however, treats Fitzgerald as if he had virtually no political convictions. He cites with evident admiration Budd Schulberg's comment that, toward the end, Fitzgerald sat in the Hollywood sunshine reading Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire* "like an eager sociology student bucking for an A in Bunny Wilson's class in social consciousness." And he remarks:

> Despite his apparent political naïveté, Fitzgerald resisted the *Zeitgeist*. He never swallowed, as did the more sophisticated Wilson, the illusory bait of Communism. As he shrewdly told Perkins, while attempting to explain Wilson's gloom: "A decision to adopt Communism definitely, no matter how good for the soul, must of necessity be a saddening process for anyone who has ever tasted the intellectual pleasures of the world we live in."

But in fact—while Fitzgerald *was* dazzled by the high style, mobility, and grace of the very rich, whose life he tried vainly to emulate—he was nevertheless full of leftist political sympathies from his earliest youth. The tension between capital and labor in his short story "May Day" (set on the red holiday in 1919) is neither merely historical nor incidental. And Fitzgerald's sympathy with the socialists is not shallow. At Princeton, Fitzgerald had fallen under the sway of Shaw, Wells, and the English Fabians. *This Side of Paradise* (1920) ends with Amory Blaine's defense of socialism to the capitalist father of one of his Princeton classmates. "This is the first time in my life I've argued Socialism," Amory declares. "It's the only panacea I know. I'm restless. I'm sick of a system where the richest man gets the most

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beautiful girl if he wants her, where the artist without an income has to sell his talents to a button manufacturer." And he tells Jesse Ferrenby's father that he has "every reason to throw my mind and pen in with the radicals." Of course his reasons for preferring socialism here may be romantic twaddle; but the socialist Upton Sinclair—Fitzgerald told his editor Max Perkins in 1922—had led him (illogically) to conclude that "freedom has produced the greatest tyranny under the sun" in America. "I'm still a socialist," he wrote; but he said that he dreaded that "things will grow worse and worse the more the people nominally rule. The strong are too strong for us and the weak too weak."

The Great Gatsby is pervaded with, if not revolutionary fervor, at least deep-seated resentment of the rich, the careless and irresponsible class produced by "capitalist avarice." *Tender Is the Night*, moreover, in its outline form, identifies Dick Diver as a Communist who intends to send his son to Russia for the right kind of education. Between 1932 and 1934, in fact, Fitzgerald even allowed La Paix, his house in Baltimore, to be used for meetings organized by local Maryland Communists. He had great trouble, he told Ceci Taylor at this time, in reconciling his "double allegiance to the class I am part of, and the Great Change I believe in." He broke with the Communists in 1934 but only because of their meddlesomeness in his art and their reprehensible position on the Negro question.

Yet, toward the end of his life, he reaffirmed his left-wing political convictions in saying to his daughter, Scottie, that he did not believe that "the system that produced Barbara Hutton [a millionaire playgirl] could survive more than ten years, any more than the French monarchy could survive 1789." He said that "most questions in life" had an "Economic basis (at least according to us Marxians)," and he told Scottie that if she read "the terrible chapter in *Das Kapital* on 'The Working Day'" she would never be "quite the same." For him, as he told Perkins just before his death, Spengler and Marx were "the only modern philosophers that still manage to make sense in this horrible mess."

Luckily for us Fitzgerald did not hector us with these views in his fiction or he might have turned out to be another hack like Upton Sinclair. But these political and social attitudes do find their way into the fiction in dozens of subtle ways. Meyers, however, is not interested in them. Nor does he care to explore Fitzgerald's deeper attitude toward transcendental idealism, institutional religion, or American history. His preoccupation is always Zelda's madness and Fitzgerald's self-destruction.

One recent reader of Fitzgerald who does insist on seeing the writer in a socio-political context is Ronald Berman in *The Great Gatsby and Modern Times*. Berman, sometime chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities (1971–1977), is the author of *A Reader's Guide to Shakespeare's Plays* and *How Television Sees Its Audience*. In this book he turns to the impact on Fitzgerald's imagination of various strands of popular culture, elements in the text that produce an "intricate statement of time and place." The time and place of *The Great Gatsby* is of course a fictionalized Long Island and New York City in the 1920s, and Berman immerses us in the commercial advertisements, the newspapers, the popular novels, magazines, and movies of the day. I confess to an admiration for criticism that historicizes the work of art, that brings back to recollection—or, for a new generation, introduces into consciousness for the first time—the context in which a novel was written. Of course there are many contexts that might be adduced and described by a biographer or critic. I have already indicated that I would have selected elements composing one different from that of Meyers. But in historicizing Fitzgerald's novel, Berman is right to point out that the novelist was more interested in the popcult forms of his time than in the timeless treasures of the cultural past (perhaps Keats excepted). Nobody made more expert use in his fiction of popular songs, the starlets of the silver

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screen, and well-known public settings (the Plaza, Delmonico's, Madison Square Garden). Berman throws a wide net over these cultural phenomena and brings up, from time to time, some wonderfully lively glittering fish.

But the historicizing of a work of art presents peculiar complications, especially when it involves an attack on one set of values (said to be outdated) in favor of another (said to be right for "modern times"). Berman shares the view that ideas and values—no less than brands of deodorant or popular songs—have a provenance and a life-span, and he is keen to expose ideas and values in the novel that not only have no utility now but had none for the American culture of the 1920s. Notions of success and of race, multicultural social attitudes, ideas about what it means to be chivalric, a hero, and a gentleman are all subjected here to the test of some contemporaneous utility. James Gatz re-created himself all right, but he used, for Berman, defunct and outdated cultural material. Berman looks at the Horatio Alger novels of the *fin de siècle,* the rise of the Boy Scouts, Teddy Roosevelt's call for the strenuous life, the *Vanity Fair* images of style and distinction, and he pronounces them passé: "I am not sure that Gatsby has invented himself—it looks much more likely that he has assembled himself; and that he has used texts and ideas so firmly rooted in the past that they cannot make the transition to modern times." The presumption seems to be that if Jimmy Gatz had modeled himself on the snappy, up-to-date ideals of Modernity in the Jazz Age, Daisy Fay would have swooned into his arms and Gatsby would not have been shot.

But in fact the power of *The Great Gatsby* derives in part from Fitzgerald's wise understanding that every ideal exists outside of history and that the attempt to actualize or incarnate an ideal invariably degrades it. Except for the slob, we all, like Gatsby, would like to look good. But how can we look good when the only clothes available to us descend, in a manner of speaking, from flaky designers, Seventh Avenue hustlers, and the vacuous but trendy sales staff at Bloomingdale's or K Mart? Gatsby's gaudy silk shirts and pink suits may make us cringe, as they did Fitzgerald. We may think we always look better, especially if we shop (as the novelist did) at Brooks Brothers. But a photograph of us in 1960s bell-bottom slacks and a Nehru jacket will show how ridiculous all styles are, how pathetic is the degradation of the sartorial ideal of looking good when it is translated into actual fabrics and designs. To contemplate a major man—say, Plato—in a toga is to have him degraded by images of John Belushi in *Animal House.* Who can bear to see Abraham Lincoln in that stovepipe hat, and who wishes to think of Shakespeare in a doublet, hose, and codpiece? Style, it may be said, is the joke time plays on us.

In any case, Fitzgerald created in Gatsby a romantic platonist whose ideal for himself is more exalted than he can conceivably attain. His ideal of a beloved is likewise nobler than any actual woman, much less Daisy Fay, could possibly ever be. Gatsby's (and Fitzgerald's) fix on the relation between the ideal and the actual might as well be called a permanent feature of human perception and cognition. To dismiss as outdated in the modern world the actualities that Gatsby finds available to reshape himself with is to miss a perennial form of aspiration itself, a recurrent mode taken by our striving for the perfection of form, the eternal longing for an ideal that will transcend the paltriness of time's styles and the insubstantiality of the merely actual. For the romantic sensibility like Gatsby's the ideal *is* an illusion but it is not any less real. And as Fitzgerald told Ludlow Fowler in 1924, "That's the whole burden of this novel—the loss of those illusions that give such color to the world so that you don't care whether things are true or false as long as they partake of the magical glory."

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Poems *by Teresa Iverson, Prescott Evarts & Jeffrey Harrison*

"From a confusion of shapes"

At his birth, in the yard a chicken
scratched after seeds,
spirals of Stars and lichen,
scarried Albano, tracks of seas;
child to man: one vision is lacing
painted braids and a backward scrawl
with gusts of breath erasing
his "Supper," on a dank wall.

Unfinished Jerome and the lion
linger together outside a cave,
Alexanders, kings, Napoleon
leap over the stage,
"And I will make mortars and guns,"
he wrote, to Ludovico, the Moor,
submarines, pre-imagined
instruments of modern war.

Leda's twin twists the swan covers,
shrouded smile of St. Anne,
near a twilit grotto, Grace hovers:
a Virgin's foreshortened hand;
toothless the flesh-carved crania
he pursued in Milan,
at Cloux, a Gioconda smirked
at the furrowed crag of a man.

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Mountains that cataracts heave
over plains, to a sea's devotions,
"because from a confusion of shapes
come many wonderful inventions,"
unyielding, unerupted
the smile and the storm's rage,
his hand lifting
trembles above the page.

Mountains: how volcanic sources
slip grain by grain to the sea!—
armored tanks, fat-haunched horses,
equestrian reveries,
designs, in flux, forces
of wind and water and wax,
all technological resources:
half-executed clay facts.

—*Teresa Iverson*

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The classical world

A doze is a light sleep
the mind dips into,
then wakes from, achingly,
into little *Iliad*s,
with the leaves as warriors,
the arrows flickering,
the omen birds passing.

They could fight all day.
They could die quickly,
a single thrust of the spear,
the light suddenly gone,
the body far from home,
splayed in the dust
for the feasting of birds and dogs.

The mind hobbles from sleep
like prayers, the old women
that come long after ruin;
approaching steps in the hall
rouse us to our feet
among the bending swans
of college afternoons.

—*Prescott Evarts*

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The lonely planet

Before you left, no one could understand
why you would want to go to such a place—
"Is there anything to see there? What's wrong
with Europe, anyway?"—but now that you're there,
you see that others are doing what you are,
traveling indefinitely, taking trains
to place-names that become actual places
then turn back into names again, but changed
forever for your having seen them.
And all of them are reading the same book
about the lonely planet. This is how
they know each other (like a secret sect)
and why they don't stay lonely for very long.
Or, put another way, because they are lonely
they are easy to meet, and the conversation
takes off faster than the train itself.
By the time you get to your next destination,
you feel as if you are parting with old friends,
and despite their names and home addresses
scribbled inside the cover of your book,
your loneliness returns with a new force:
it's not that you will never see them again
but rather that you'll run into them next week
in another province of the lonely planet.

—*Jeffrey Harrison*

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Art

"Origins of Impressionism" at the Met

by Karen Wilkin

More often than not, the history of art is presented in shapely chunks, each "ism" nicely circumscribed and clearly defined, in a neat ideological and chronological progression. But reality is far messier than this orderly structure suggests, the phenomena of period and national style, not to mention the *Zeitgeist*, notwithstanding. Individuals and even whole "isms" rarely fit tidily into time charts. There's all that in-between territory and all those people with radically differing ideas about art whose lifetimes and careers overlap disconcertingly. Corot, for example, born in 1796, was two years older than Delacroix but lived until 1875, long enough to exhibit at the same time as Monet, forty-four years his junior. Monet lived until 1926, almost twenty years after Picasso painted *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* and two years after the Surrealists published their first Manifesto.

The Dutch historian Johan Huizinga, in his classic study *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, described the transition between the medieval period and the Renaissance as an incoming tide, a series of waves inexorably moving inland, some breaking higher, some lower. You could call the low-water mark the end of the Middle Ages and the high-water mark the start of the Renaissance, but what about that stretch of wet beach in between? With its record of unsystematic advances and retreats, it could be the most thought-provoking area to explore. The current exhibition at the Metropolitan, "Origins of Impressionism," is an effort to examine just such a zone, the region below the high-water mark of Impressionism.[1] Surprisingly, this is the first show to concentrate on this rich, transitional period. It's full of wonderful, familiar works, some surprises, and some distinctly minor, not very edifying efforts, all placed in unfamiliar relationships. Through the force of visual evidence, intelligently presented, it makes you think about them in slightly different terms.

That's no mean accomplishment. Impressionism is the closest thing we have to a truly popular modernist movement. People who would be hard-pressed to identify a Sisley or a Pissarro can speak assuredly about the Impressionist painters' desire to record nature truthfully, to capture specific qualities of light, particulars of weather, and all the rest of it. They can talk about broken strokes, divided color, chromatic opposites, optical mixing, and intensification of hues. More sophisticated viewers can describe Impressionism as a break with an exhausted academic tradition and allude to such icons as Manet's *Olympia* or *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, or Monet's Haystacks. Everyone loves Im-

1 "Origins of Impressionism" opened at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, on September 27, 1994, and remains on view through January 8, 1995. It was previously seen at the Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, Paris (April 19–August 8, 1994). A catalogue, by Gary Tinterow and Henri Loyrette, has been published by the Met and Harry N. Abrams (485 pages, $75; $45 paper).

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pressionist painting and everyone knows something about it.

Like all clichés, these oversimplifications are grounded in truth, but the history of what we now refer to as Impressionism is far more complex, more subtle, and more unpredictable than the shorthand popular version even hints at. "Origins of Impressionism" goes a long way toward making this clear. It focuses on a single, crucial decade, the 1860s, formative years for a group of ambitious young painters struggling to find their distinctive voices and their places within the art establishment of the mid-nineteenth century. Not yet dubbed Impressionists, these aspiring artists were discussed, in their early years, simply as exponents of "New Painting." "Impressionism" came into use only after their initial group exhibition, held in 1874, when a critic wrote dismissively of Monet's *Impression, Sunrise*, now in the Musée Marmottan. It's worth noting that the textbook description of Impressionist painting—landscapes or cityscapes executed *en plein air* with a broken stroke and divided color—applies only to some works painted after 1870; by such a definition, of course, only Monet could consistently be termed an Impressionist. The cumulative effect of the show and its catalogue is to help broaden this definition and to build a case for how the New Painters were formed, what they were looking at, and how their pictures and those of their contemporaries, both the ones they admired and the ones they detested, were perceived in their own day. The starting point is the Salon of 1859, which is used as a kind of prologue, an encapsulation of the state of the French art world when the New Painters first launched themselves.

The catalogue essays, by the exhibition's curators, Gary Tinterow of the Metropolitan and Henri Loyrette of the Musée d'Orsay, are bolstered by ample quotations from the criticism of the period, a full spectrum of opinion from conservative champions of established values to perceptive supporters of the new. Among the latter were Baudelaire and Zacharie Astruc, both part of the New Painters' circle and, like them, impatient with the stale and the predictable. (The decision to include the original text of quoted passages as footnotes on the pages where the translations appear is to be applauded.) We learn that conservative and progressive observers alike were troubled by the Salon of 1859. Baudelaire found it dull, although he did like a small, vigorous Delacroix of a scene from the classical past and a straightforward, light-filled Fromentin of a North African street. But he concluded, "No explosion; no unknown genius." Astruc concurred: "Art is repeating itself." Most critics agreed that technical facility was present in abundance but ambition was lacking. Most notably, the once sacrosanct hierarchy that maintained distinctions between history painting, portraits, genre scenes, and—at the bottom of the heap—landscape and still life was eroding. This situation, the exhibition's organizers believe, helped to make possible the evolution of New Painting, with its iconography of modern life, indoors and out, and its fascination with urban landscape, as background, subject, and phenomenon. (They also believe that "full-blown" Impressionist color owes a greater debt to Japanese prints than to a quest for optical sensation, but that's another matter.)

It's the paintings in the show that really tell the story. Yes, there are a lot of text panels, as there always are these days, some informative, some obvious, some irritating, but you can ignore them; every picture in the exhibition speaks to others, bearing irrefutable witness to dialogue and exchange, influence, assimilation, and rejection. You can watch the young Monet, the young Cézanne, the young Degas, testing possibilities, exploring alternatives, variously following and swerving away from accepted practices, and, in the end, turning those practices upside down. Many of the show's pictures are well known to anyone who regularly visits the Met or the Musée d'Orsay, or who paid attention to the retrospective exhibitions devoted to individual New Painters over the past ten or twelve years—the studies of Manet, Pissarro, De-

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gas, the early Cézanne, Bazille, Renoir, and aspects of Monet, seen in this country and abroad—but the pieces of the puzzle have been recombined in new ways in "Origins of Impressionism."

The show begins with a capsule version of the Salon of 1859, a token selection—there were almost four thousand works in the original—ranging from the not very sublime to the ridiculous. There's a sleek Gérôme, an exercise in archeological correctness; a chalky Puvis de Chavannes, like a freeze-dried Renaissance fresco; a life-size Italian scene by Hébert, best described as icky; an uncharacteristically clumsy Corot, obviously designed to satisfy the expectations of the Salon's jurors; a good Daubigny, which looks more like a Corot than the Corot; and —in the "ridiculous" category—a Troyon, of the coyest cow ever painted. You'd swear she was batting her eyelashes. The Delacroix that Baudelaire liked looks fine, especially in comparison to the rest; "dull" doesn't begin to cover most of it. Yet the transition to the work of the young New Painters is more seamless than we might expect. It's obvious that while the new generation may have ended up by profoundly altering the aesthetic values of the nineteenth century, they were reluctant rebels, willing to respond to the lessons both of the past and of their contemporaries. Degas's early flirtation with a personal brand of Neo-Classical history painting—those slightly prurient scenes of young Spartans fighting, or the overwrought panoramas of medieval legends—make perfect sense as responses to Puvis's example. Even Manet's startling nudes and his pitiless religious paintings take on a different connotation in the context of the Salon's standards.

It seems increasingly clear, too, as the exhibition unfolds in a series of thematic groupings of disparate and like-minded artists linked by similar subject matter—history painting, the realist landscape, the nude, figures in a landscape, still life, and more—that the New Painters were not so much enemies of traditional values as ad-

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mirers of Realism. Courbet emerges as a pivotal, monumental figure, a potent influence more for the *spirit* of his art than for the look of it—which is not to say that his distinctly untraditional paint handling, from painstaking illusionism to brutal piling, wasn't of great importance to the younger painters. (Apropos, whoever wrote the wall texts seems positively fixated on the significance of using a palette knife.) Courbet appears to have been a kind of role model for the future Impressionists. Insistent on his fidelity to nature, unwilling to conform to accepted standards in either making his pictures or conducting his career, brilliant in the use of publicity—he'd have done well in the 1980s, I suspect—Courbet must have offered a potent example of how to remain independent and still achieve fame—or at least notoriety—and success. (His persecution by the government for his role in the short-lived Commune of 1871 was still long in the future.) And the grittiness, the tough, uningratiating quality of his paintings, was unignorable.

At the Met, seeing Courbet's voluptuously sprawling nude, *Woman with a Parrot* (1866, Metropolitan Museum of Art), beside Renoir's ample but polite *Bather with a Terrier* (1870, Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand) and Manet's Rembrandtesque *Surprised Nymph* (1861, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires), a fleshy earth mother, at once utterly traditional and transgressive, made it plain how much Manet and Courbet's art had in common—its boldness and directness, its simultaneous embrace and rejection of the achievements of the past—and, too, how different Manet and Courbet's art was in temperature, the former "cool" in the McLuhan-esque sense, the latter "hot." The grouping made plain, too, how little Renoir shared in this dialogue, how essentially light-weight—if you can say this of a man with his taste for hefty women—a painter he usually was. In Paris, the point was hammered home by the inclusion of the painting that provoked *Woman with a Parrot*, Manet's *Olympia* (1863, Musée d'Orsay). (Courbet disliked *Olympia* and offered *Woman with a Parrot* as a form of "correction" to his younger colleague.) In New York we can see the next link in the sequence, a few rooms further on: Manet's answer to Courbet, the Met's glorious standing figure in pink, *Woman with a Parrot* (1866), placed near *The Street Singer* (1862, Boston Museum of Fine Arts), which, like *Woman with a Parrot*, is a stunning image of a voluminously clad full-length figure distinguished by subtly orchestrated color and an astonishing touch. Happy as this pairing is, it might have been more informative to see the two bird-fancying women side by side. Imagine the confrontation of Courbet's recklessly abandoned nude, all flowing hair and seductively disposed limbs, awkwardly drawn and oddly composed, with Manet's assured, firmly painted standing figure in her form-concealing pink robe, a self-contained, high-minded image that at once pays homage to Velázquez and points toward Matisse. Compared to the Courbet, Manet's painting seems at first glance cool, sober, almost austere, yet it may actually be sexier than the Courbet, in the juiciness of its paint, the sensuality of its stroke. (It's up for grabs as to whose relationship to the parrot is more suggestive, leaving aside the question of the relative effectiveness of display versus concealment.)

The show's strength lies in such pairings and groupings. It's one thing to know that Pissarro and Cézanne painted together in the 1860s, and another to see, in close proximity, pictures that look as though each painter were following the advice of the other. It's illuminating to see these works alongside related efforts by the older, well-received landscape painters, such as Daubigny and Corot, whom Cézanne and Pissarro were trying both to emulate and surpass, with Courbet's robust landscapes supplying the missing part of the equation. In the same way, a stunning line-up of four views of the bathing place known as "La Grenouillère," two each by Renoir and Monet, all painted in 1869, makes the differences between their authors all too evident. The Monets are about the sparkle of

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light on water, the visual complexity of painted boats, the randomness of figures within an unstable, dappled, sun-struck world. The Renoirs, no less lively, with their patchy strokes and broken light patterns, are primarily about people on shore or on the little "island" with its single tree. Monet's palette is cool and surprising: watery greens, liquid blues, sun-bleached ochres. Renoir's color harmonies are more naturalistic and, well, *prettier*.

Other groupings document relationships among artists, reinforcing implicit connections visible in their canvases with evidence of real exchange. That Bazille, Sisley, and Renoir were close friends is not exactly news; but it is no less engaging to see Bazille's painting of a dead heron beside Renoir's portrait of his tall, rangy colleague at work on that canvas, and Sisley's more tightly and harmoniously composed version of the same still life, minus one dead bird, beside the Renoir. Bazille's best-known painting, *Studio on the rue La Condamine* (1869–70, Musée d'Orsay), is itself a document of the period. Bazille painted his friends Manet, Renoir, Zola, Edmond Maître, and Astruc (some say this figure is Monet, one of Bazille's closest friends) in his bare, bright studio, walls decorated with his own and his colleagues' pictures. One of the pleasures of "Origins of Impressionism" is seeing Bazille, a truly marginalized painter, get the attention he deserves. A casualty of the Franco–Prussian War at twenty-eight, in 1870, Bazille never exhibited with the "Impressionists" and is often excluded from discussion of their work. As the monographic exhibition of his work seen at the Brooklyn Museum last year demonstrated, Bazille was an uneven but ambitious painter. He had made notable strides, but he was not yet wholly formed as an artist when he died so tragically young. It's good to see him in the context of that of his fellow New Painters, although even his most devoted admirers would have to admit that his work is more interesting for its promise and its connections with the work of his friends than for its intrinsic merits.

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Bazille's paintings—and his history—raise the question of whom among the New Painters we might pick as worth keeping an eye on, if we didn't know his work after 1870. Manet, of course, looks like a giant throughout the show—as he does in almost any context—here because of the *authority*, the generosity, and the clarity of his paintings from the crucial decade under review. The controlled energy of Manet's touch, the breadth of his modeling, like the unexpectedness and richness of his palette, make his paintings resonate like powerful chords. Monet declares himself rapidly, as well. Obviously a prodigious talent, he quickly finds his voice. In picture after picture in the 1860s, he uses his bold touch and an unfailing eye for tonality and hue to construct powerful evocations of outdoor light and air. The delectable *Women in a Garden* (1866–67, Musée d'Orsay) and the equally celebrated *Garden at Sainte-Adresse* (1867, Metropolitan Museum of Art), with their brilliant sunlight, their schematic but instantly identifiable flowers, their almost physical sense of place and weather, are as good as anything Monet painted for the next half-century. The form and structure of later pictures may be more surprising and, to late-twentieth-century eyes, more inventive, but the early pictures are already as intense, both as pure painting and as distillations of actuality, as any of Monet's mature work.

The young Cézanne may prove to be the most compelling of the New Painters in "Origins of Impressionism," but not because of the sureness of his pictures of the 1860s. Quite the opposite. The young Monet claims our attention and admiration through the vividness with which he summons up our sensations of nature, the young Manet, through the excellence of his paint handling and the lucidity of his structures. The young Cézanne, as Lawrence Gowing's superb exhibition of the early work made evident a few years ago, indelibly etches himself into your consciousness through sheer perversity. At the Met, you are constantly stopped short by his passionate, loaded canvases, now murky and backlit, now blazing with a raw version of Venetian color, now somber and nearly oppressive. He's all over the place: bacchanals, religious subjects, moralizing genre scenes, ominous landscapes, clumsy but intensely felt portraits. And then, suddenly, the dispassionate *Black Clock* (*c.* 1870, Private Collection), with all the turbulence and barely suppressed sensuality of the earlier works channeled and transformed. *The Black Clock* is no less highly charged than the bacchanals and that astonishing Mary Magdalen, uneasily poised between a "black" Goya and a Blue Period Picasso, but somehow, for the first time, paint and image have achieved a tense harmony that points to what Cézanne would become. Throughout the show, Cézanne's canvases keep wrenching themselves out of their context, almost out of their century; their subject matter may reflect their author's desire to contend with traditional subjects, but they simply refuse to settle down. The only moment when Cézanne seems to have any real contemporaries is when he and Pissarro joined forces, when they looked to the Barbizon painters for guidance in how to approach landscape in a naturalistic fashion.

This link between the New Painters and their predecessors has already been graphically presented in New York, in Kermit Champa's impeccably chosen exhibition "The Rise of Landscape Painting in France: Corot to Monet," which toured the U.S. in 1991 and '92. Like the curators of "Origins of Impressionism," Champa believes that the growing importance of large-scale landscape painting in the early nineteenth century helped to determine the direction followed by the future Impressionists. His show examined the role of the Barbizon painters, particularly Corot, in developing a non-academic, naturalistic approach to landscape that served as a model for the New Painters. Champa reached back, linking Corot and his fellows—Daubigny, Diaz, Théodore Rousseau—with Constable, whose *Hay Wain* served as both an inspiration and a challenge to his young French colleagues when it was seen at the Salon of 1824. Constable's ver-

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nacular subject matter and vigorous paint application—with a palette knife—were regarded as somewhat subversive and dangerous, but they were soon assimilated by the Barbizon painters and, later, by the self-proclaimed prophet of Realism, the young Courbet. By the time the fledgling Impressionists were beginning to exhibit, this brand of "tough naturalism" was accepted practice and the Barbizon painters themselves were the establishment; Courbet, of course, remained a kind of professional bad boy. This is the moment when "Origins of Impressionism" begins.

In some ways, the most telling painting in the Met's exhibition is one of the least flashy, one that it is possible to overlook here since it must compete with *Women in a Garden*. Monet's *River at Bennecourt* (1868, Art Institute of Chicago) is a prophetic picture, pointing to the future concerns of both the artist himself and Impressionism as a whole. It's a modest picture: a woman seated on a riverbank, with her back to us, beneath a couple of trees that stretch the full height of the canvas, regards the scene in front of her. The scene presented to the viewer of the picture, however, is not the village across the river but its reflection in the surface of the water. The trees, in fact, block our view, so that we chiefly see the village, inverted and slightly unhinged, in the staccato strokes of the river. The woman becomes an internal beholder, a surrogate for the viewer from whom she turns away and whose command of the scene that she studies is canceled by the trees. The subject of the painting is not what is seen, but the act of seeing itself. The picture is broadly painted—there's none of the fine-grained divisionism of the years to come in this patchy, spotted and dotted world—but the image seems about to shatter into a host of detached strokes, the way the reflected images displayed across the center of the canvas would shatter if the surface of the water were disturbed. For anyone with the luxury of knowing what happened after 1870, the picture is a glimpse into the future, a preview of Monet's—and Impressionism's—fascination with unstable phenomena, with the transient, with spectacle, with leisure moments extracted from the workaday world. Even the reflections will come into their own, as we know from Monet's last paintings—the ones contemporary with the advent of Surrealism—where the surface of his canvas becomes an equivalent for the surface of his lily pond and it becomes impossible to tell what is "real" and what is a momentary reflection.

Objections to "Origins of Impressionism"? Lesser-known and lesser artists included in the selection are represented merely by token works. Why bother? It's true that Eva Gonzalès's boy in a military uniform, for example, was perceived in its day as having something to do with Manet's (to present-day eyes) infinitely more vital *Fifer* (1866, Musée d'Orsay), but since it is the only Gonzalès and the only painting by any woman in the show, its inclusion seems more like a sop thrown to the feminists than an intellectual imperative. Still, it's about as good a picture as Gonzalès was capable of. Others are less well served. Legros, for example, and Fantin-Latour are better painters than you would suspect from the works in "Origins of Impressionism." But these are quibbles. Overall, the show is first-rate.

The catalogue of "Origins of Impressionism," a series of alternating chapters by Messrs. Tinterow and Loyrette, generally follows the thematic categories into which the exhibition has been divided. A careful marshaling of commentary from the period under review—critical writing, letters, contemporary observations, and the like—assembled to bring to life the decade of what the curators call "the foundations of Impressionism," the essays are a little plodding, but occasionally dazzling; they are uniformly full of marvelous information, whether or not you agree wholly with the authors' conclusions. The catalogue entries, for each exhibited work, are scholarly, informative, and useful. The reproductions are no worse than usual. Some of them are even pretty good.

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Exhibition notes

"Cy Twombly: A Retrospective"
at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.
September 25, 1994–January 10, 1995

There are one or two works in the Twombly show at MOMA that make you feel there's some point in your being there. In a few paintings dating from about 1959, Twombly's art attains an atmospheric warmth and elegance of touch that is undeniably pleasing. Yet these paintings are never more than elegant, a serious drawback in an artist with such grand ambitions. Throughout most of the rest of the exhibition, Twombly's paintings are empty, repetitive, and boring. How strange to find an artist who, although interested in expressing himself in the sparest, most epigrammatic fashion, requires acres of canvas and installations with museum ceilings in order to do so.

I don't buy the common interpretation that sees Twombly as a kind of hinge between Jackson Pollock's gestural expressionism and the graffiti artists of the 1980s. The link to Pollock is obvious, of course, never more so than in the celebrated "blackboard" paintings, with their rows of looping white lines against a charcoal-gray ground. Those paintings represent a domestication of Abstract Expressionism, however, a draining-out of its energy that leaves us with something tame, decorative, and dead.

Rather than an early-blooming graffiti artist, then, Twombly seems more a species of Conceptual artist. If there's a link to be made to another artist, I think it is to the Josef Beuys of the drawings. In the work of both, the scrawled mark—or, in Twombly's case, the inscribed word—is a sign for something outside the picture and therefore a substitute for what should be in it. It's a mistake to read them aesthetically, since, both are extra-aesthetic artifacts, records of the artist's state—spiritual, mental, emotional—rather than self-sustaining images.

In Twombly's work, this is particularly apparent when he takes on large themes, such as the Trojan War. It may say something about the times we live in that it is difficult for working artists to speak convincingly in the heroic mode. But it also says something about Twombly's limitations as an artist that these multi-canvas cycles—even the single pictures with classical subjects—just don't engage the viewer. They tell us that Twombly likes these subjects, even identifies with them, but nothing more. Twombly can't recast his classical subjects in any meaningful way because his language of marks and signs limits our dialogue with them to notational references. These paintings are mere asides; they are not the meditations, even the calls to arms, that they aspire to be.

A catalogue, written by the exhibition's curator, Kirk Varnedoe, has been published by the Museum of Modern Art and Harry N. Abrams (176 pages, $55; $29.95 paper).

—Eric Gibson

"Mario Cavaglieri:
The Glittering Years 1912–1922"
at the Jewish Museum, New York.
October 2, 1994–January 29, 1995

To say that Mario Cavaglieri (1887–1969) is one of the lesser-known figures in twentieth-century art is to risk an understatement of sizable proportions. Although he is an artist of some note in his native Italy, Cavaglieri is virtually unknown throughout the rest of the world. "The Glittering Years" is the first one-man exhibition of his work to be seen in the United States. (Three of his paintings were included in the Jewish Museum's 1989 show "Gardens and Ghettos: The Art of Jewish Life in Italy.") In her preface to the catalogue, Joan Rosenbaum, the director of the Jewish Museum, writes that "The Glittering Years" will "undoubtedly contribute to the ongoing revision of the history of Modernism." Given the work on view, this statement says more about the institution's optimism than it does about the quality of Cavaglieri's paintings.

The exhibition title takes as its conceit the "glitter" of both the social milieu depicted in Cavaglieri's work and the manner in which

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it was painted. Born to wealthy parents, Cavaglieri filled his paintings with members of the upper class and their trappings: fashionable young women (and, though they appear less frequently, men) strike poses in opulent interiors laden with exotica. It is said that Cavaglieri wore a tuxedo while he painted. Whether this is true or not is beside the point: it's a memorable image that captures this aspect of his "glitter."

The "glitter" of Cavaglieri's *painting*, however, is more problematic. Enamored of the work of the Intimists and not blind to the major art of his time, Cavaglieri never fully grasped the nuances of painting. His notion of painting was to fill the spaces with gusto and a loaded brush. Cavaglieri obviously loved the physicality of oils, often squeezing paint directly from the tube onto the canvas. This excessive painterliness is not uninteresting, and works best when Cavaglieri concentrates on finicky detail work. The cake-frosting treatment of an ornately patterned tablecloth in *Romanticism* (1915) has the vitality of someone genuinely having fun; it's an oddly affecting, if vulgar, bit of painting. But, for the most part, Cavaglieri's "action" painting is illustrative.

As a social portraitist, Cavaglieri was incompetent. The figures in his work are stiffly rendered, almost amateurish. Incapable of plumbing the personalities of his sitters, Cavaglieri was, perhaps, too timid to attempt the stylization of the human form his work seems to call for. (Comparisons to Klimt and Matisse are inevitable and telling.) When he tried psychological narrative, as in the self-explanatory *Before the Engagement Was Broken Off* (1918), the results are embarrassing. In her catalogue essay, Emily Braun of Hunter College assails Cavaglieri's depiction of women, equating his impastoed portrayals with their being "subordinated" into objects. She has a point: the women (and men) in his paintings are little more than mannequins. Yet, one feels this has less to do with Cavaglieri's attitude toward women than it does with the fact that he simply could not draw very well.

Not surprisingly, Cavaglieri's most suc-

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cessful paintings are those in which no figures appear. In his paintings of interiors, he seems to have relished being freed from depicting the human form. Indeed, in *Chinese Vases with an Indian Carpet* (1915) and *An Indian Carpet with Chinese Idols* (1914) he approaches a certain mastery, particularly in his rendering of carpets. Whether he responded to their rhythmic patterns or to working from a predetermined image, Cavaglieri painted carpets with conviction. Here his swirls of impasto no longer sit inertly on the canvas—they gain life as painting. But his is a small achievement. Indeed, "Mario Cavaglieri: The Glittering Years 1912–1922" is proof that, at times, it is far kinder to consign some painters to historical obscurity than it is to bring them to light.

The catalogue of the exhibition is published by Edizioni Gabriele Mazzotta (226 pages, $40 paper).

—*Mario Naves*

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Theater

Boat show

by Mark Steyn

Family values: where would the theater be without them? *Show Boat* (Gershwin Theatre) and *A Cheever Evening* (Playwrights Horizons) are both about families, both nuclear and in the more proliferated sense. Both sprawl across the generations, *Show Boat* from the 1880s to the 1920s, *Cheever* from the Forties to the Seventies. Both contain miscegenation, in *Show Boat* between a white man and a Negress, in *Cheever* between a WASP man and a Jewess. *Show Boat* follows the drift from rural roots toward the cities; *Cheever* makes the journey in reverse, from Manhattan to the 'burbs to East Coast summer colonies. *Show Boat*, as the years unfold and the fragrant ballads yield to raucous rags and jazz, embraces the hurly-burly of America in its period of most rapid expansion; *Cheever*'s world is defensive, its elegant decline symbolized by the final image—a resort town, at the end of season, at sunset.

You might also think that one's a play and one's a musical. But you'd be wrong. The nearer to a musical is *A Cheever Evening*, the condition it aspires to that of an "And then he wrote . . ." compilation show, where a smash songwriter's catalogue is organized into pointed juxtapositions and artful medleys. Here, instead of a selection from your favorite scores, it's a selection from your favorite score-settlings—a medley of sniping and sneering, nagging and niggling from the author's short stories: a sort of *Chide by Chide by Cheever* or, if you're less exercised by what's at issue, *Quaint Misbehavin'*.

The title and Cheever's photo on the *Playbill* let you know who's in charge. The only significant speech not drawn from the collected stories comes from Cheever's own preface to the stories—those evocative lines about "a long-lost world when the city of New York was still filled with a river light, when you heard the Benny Goodman quartets from a radio in the corner stationery store, and when almost everybody wore a hat." It *sounds* like a song lyric, right down to that "Ah, they don't write 'em like they used to" wistfulness. As is the way in play productions these days, it's not long before the sound system's working overtime, pumping out Benny Goodman and the theme from *Moulin Rouge* and the Beatles. But that rather misses the point: Cheever's characters can't sing, they're too buttoned-up; they can't let rip with big open-voweled "Make Believe"s and "Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man"s, they can only duel through clenched teeth and clenched buttocks. (To protest the party's stuffiness, one drunken guest strips off, but very considerately, at the underwear stage, turns his back to us—an appropriate image for this restrained production.) These are people who wound most deeply through off-handedness. You're intrigued by the challenge: A. R. Gurney has covered so much of the same WASPy East Coast ground in his own plays that it's surely not the content but the form that's attracted him to a John Cheever tapestry. Don Scardino's staging, on a small but silent revolve divided

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into separate living (and literal) quarters, is spare and stylish, emphasizing both good taste and a certain emotional distance, and Gurney begins with a good theatrical idea. He takes Cheever's story of the radio set which starts picking up neighboring apartments, and uses it, as Jim and Irene tune along the dial, to drop in other stories, other lives. It's a strong dramatic frame: a cliché in songbook shows like *Five Guys Named Moe*, but apt and engaging for characters who tune in to gossip and cocktail-party chit-chat as if it's a social Hit Parade. You assume, too, that Gurney chose this story as the opening number to remind us that, although we cherish Cheever as an observer, his stories have their flights of fancy, too.

But the device goes nowhere. It's dropped, and Gurney moves on: more excerpts, more details, more twitchy, neurotic characters for his versatile cast of six to drop in and out of. In the end, it all seems pretty arbitrary—like one of those Cole Porter laundry lists, an accumulation of amusing details, but without a central point. Moreover, in its very structure, it misses the profound, elegiac sadness of the source material. In *Show Boat*, when Julie sings "Bill," you care because of what you know about her: that's your point of view on the song. Gurney's shake 'n' break format means that no character ever lingers long enough to give the glib quips any kind of perspective. The comedy plays well, because, in the time Gurney allows, that's easiest to get a handle on—especially John Cunningham as the suburban burglar and Julie Hagerty as the housewife on the edge whose husband is convinced she's poisoning his meals. But details aren't enough. *A Cheever Evening* needs some dramatic momentum if the material's going to hold the stage.

With *Cheever*, you can't see the wood for the trees. In *Show Boat*, you can't see the wood because Harold Prince has flattened it to build an Enchanted Forest heritage theme park. It's supposed to be a musical, but it comes over like an opera, the staging as strangely detached from the show as in, say, the "tube tunnel" *Ring* cycle, or Faggioni's *Il Trovatore* set on genuine volcanic rocks imported from Mt. Vesuvius, or any other production where the director does his thing up on stage while the conductor's left sawing away in the pit trying to catch his eye.

Show Boat follows Cap'n Andy's extended family from the levee at Natchez up the river to Chicago, through three generations. All musicals are balancing acts, but with this one the first call comes on the very first word. On opening night in 1927, the audience, accustomed only to racy musical comedy and florid operetta, gave an audible gasp as the curtain rose on a most un-Broadway chorus—sweating black stevedores loading cotton as they sing:

> *Niggers* all work on the Mississippi
> *Niggers* all work while the white folks play . . .

The word shocked Manhattan's middle-class theater crowd. It is not nice, but not-niceness is such a rare quality in musicals that, for that reason alone, it merits preservation. This isn't the lumbering didacticism of Sondheim in his "Children Will Listen" mode; it just *is*: dramatic truth presented on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. Needless to say, in a culture which can't be bothered to distinguish between dramatic indictment and personal endorsement, Oscar Hammerstein's original lyric has long since been whitewashed out: by the 1936 movie, it was not "niggers" but "darkies"; by the '46 Broadway revival, "Colored folk work on the Mississippi . . ."; in the Jerome Kern biopic *Till the Clouds Roll By*, "Here we all work . . ."; and in the 1966 revival, weary of euphemistically sidestepping the matter, they just junked the opening black chorus completely. In 1988, when EMI produced a lavish recording of the "original" *Show Boat*, the conductor John McGlinn found himself turned down by many black performers who objected to the word "nigger"; the opening ended up being sung by a chorus of whey-faced effete Englishmen—not an option in the theater. Yet the continuing controversy only confirms Hammerstein's original judg-

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ment: we'd rather bleach the past than face it; "nigger" is uncomfortable because it's the right word in the right place.

So how does Hal Prince, dean of Broadway directors, approach this little difficulty? Well, he comes up with an ingenious solution: he buries the line. *Show Boat* has a curtain (made up of sepia rotogravure enlargements of the kind usually found on the wallpaper of the more ambitious steakhouse) and, when the curtain rises, as in 1927, there is an audible gasp. This time, though, we're gasping at the set: Eugene Lee, using a combination of physical scenery, film projections, and computer technology, has created a 3-D Mississippi River in perfect perspective, and, along the far bank, the *Cotton Blossom* comes serenely gliding. Having paid seventy-five bucks, we applaud gratefully—all over the first words of Kern and Hammerstein's chorus. For the record, the downtrodden barge-toters and bail-lifters in the foreground sing "Colored folk work . . ." But who cares? They could sing "Physically challenged Latino pre-op transsexuals work on the Mississippi" and we'd still be cheering the set: the song and the distinctly sweaty stevedores are mere decoration.

It sets a worrying tone: is this going to be the first *Show Boat* where you can't see the show for the boat? There are all kinds of ways of examining the play's significance in the evolution of American theater, but, to my mind, the easiest and most instructive is water capacity. Here then is a rough history of the modern stage measured in gallons:

Ebb and Flow of Water in Broadway Theater

1874—*The Deluge*: Splashy Old Testament spectacle; Noah business like show business, etc.

1899—*An Arabian Girl and Forty Thieves*: Highlight of show: torrential cascade of water in moonlight glen soaks star performer (a donkey).

1909—*A Trip to Japan*: First show with twin waterfalls, both bathed in "prismatic lights."

1915—*Ziegfeld Follies of 1915*: Opening scene set underwater, plus "Gates of Elysium" flanked by spouting elephants.

1927—*Show Boat*: Bone dry; "Ol' Man River" represented by a mere song and some painted cloths.

1935—Rodgers and Hart's *Jumbo*: First show to co-star Jimmy Durante plus elephant with loaded trunk.

1949—*South Pacific*: Mary Martin washes man right out of hair; first musical with new all-in-one shampoo'n'showtune; now you can just wash'n'crow.

1952—*Wish You Were Here*: First musical with swimming pool on stage; critics found it shallow.

1974—Burt Shevelove/Stephen Sondheim adaptation of *The Frogs*: First musical to be staged in a swimming pool, at Yale; critics found it too deep.

1986—Twyla Tharp's *Singin' in the Rain*: Sodden.

Even at a casual glance, a rough rule of thumb can be discerned: the success and durability of a musical is in inverse proportion to the amount of water in it. Unlike *A Trip to Japan*, *Show Boat* was spectacular merely in its score and subject. In Edna Ferber's original novel, the narrative rolls across the decades, bound together only by the *Cotton Blossom* boat and the Mississippi River. But how do you convey that on stage? Prince and Lee give us a "tableau vivant" straight out of the *Ziegfeld Follies* and a triple-decker boat shunted on and off (amid plenty of scenery rumbling from the wings): indeed, the director has interpolated "I Have the Room Above Her" from the second movie version for no other discernible reason than that it gives him a chance to show all three stories of his boat—Gaylord's room, Magnolia's room, and the rooftop where they meet. He's like a willful department-store elevator: he stops at every story, yet manages to miss the one story you're interested in—Gaylord's and Magnolia's ill-starred romance. "Hal likes to direct scenery," Prince's mentor George Abbott is wont to chuckle, and, in this number, you see

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what he means: the song is not remotely convincing as an expression of the riverboat gambler's emotions at this point in the drama; it is there purely as a pretext for a staging gimmick.

Somewhere around this scene in Act One, Prince's *Show Boat* stops being simply careless and sets itself up in active opposition to the qualities that make the play worth reviving in the first place. It's a staging that would have impressed Florenz Ziegfeld, the original producer: he devoted his life to "tableaux vivants," leggy showgirls, stairways to paradise, and every other known form of visual distraction. Yet his longest-running hit and most lasting legacy is a show that sells on its book and score: *Show Boat* is the first musical you don't have to make allowances for. Forget the prismatic lights and Gates of Elysium; Kern managed it better: his banjo-plunk theme for the boat —"*Cot-ton-Blos-som*"—is simply inverted to represent the Mississippi, "Ol'-Man-Riv-er." With four notes, he ties together the contrasting faces of the story: the gaiety of river life and the darker, unchanging elemental qualities of the river itself. More generally, those four notes symbolize the equally adroit union *Show Boat* engineered between the two schools of musical theater: the sweep of operetta and the intimacy of musical comedy, the musicality of an operetta score with the naturalism of musical-comedy lyric-writing. It's not that Prince and Lee's big boat and Kern and Hammerstein's big score are incompatible; it's that the former all too often swamps the latter. The show now lists from one side to the other, unable to agree on a coherent staging vocabulary.

In 1927, *Show Boat* presented its audience with something new: drama in music. Operetta offered unfamiliar non-metropolitan locales—Arabian deserts, Caribbean islands—but almost always ended up trivializing and demeaning its inhabitants; musical comedy, preoccupied with country-club idlers and bootleggers and purpose gals, was at least reasonably honest in its depiction of them. Hammerstein, a prototype showbiz liberal, wondered whether you could apply that honesty to less fashionable groups. He and Kern succeeded brilliantly: when the songs started, the story didn't stop but forged on, illuminating and enlarging. Likewise, the staging should illuminate and enlarge the score. But, with Prince, it doesn't: the stage pictures are cluttered, with too many elements jostling for attention. Poor John McMartin, as Cap'n Andy, has had the worst notices of his career for his knockabout vaudeville shtick late in Act One. But why blame him? Unlike Nicholas Hytner in *Miss Saigon*, Prince never manages to shrink that huge Gershwin stage to human size. McMartin has about as much chance as me doing card tricks at Yankee Stadium.

Take the dance arrangements, witty variations of tempi and orchestration reminiscent of Susan Stroman's earlier work on *Crazy for You*. But, in *Crazy*, Miss Stroman's choreographic turns grew organically from the songs and plot point, as natural expressions of character and emotion—delightful, romantic, fantastic, but still *true*. Here, they seem grafted on to the play: they look like contractually stipulated choreographer's moments (this is a recurring problem with Prince shows: see *Phantom*'s "Masquerade" scene). So, for example, toward the end, when Parthy and her granddaughter launch into a duet, it turns into a wild Charleston on the levee. Except that Elaine Stritch isn't up to a Charleston these days, so she's forced to bail out of the number after the vocal. Thus, a song which is supposed to be about her relationship with her granddaughter becomes just another anonymous chorus cavalcade. Star solo, dance break—with neither rhyme nor reason to connect the two. Hammerstein is the man who made sense of musicals; at times, this revival seems determined to undo his life's work.

That's what's so weird: the more Prince "modernizes" the thing, the more old-fashioned it looks—not just in the disintegrated dance, but also in the secondary romance of Joel Blum and Dorothy Stanley; Frank and Ellie seem far more like conventional comedy juveniles than they did in

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1927, but only because Prince isn't interested in them. In Toronto, several black community spokespersons denounced this production as racist. They're right: the black characters are the only ones treated with dignity and respect; the whites are reduced to musical-comedy stereotypes.

Prince has also abandoned the second-act opener—newlyweds Gay and Nola take in the '93 Chicago World's Fair—because he thinks it "irrelevant" and just a "popular convention." Okay, let's take a look: the original scene includes "In Dahomey," an exotic Zulu number performed, of course, by exotic Zulus who live round the corner and have never been east of Chicago. *Show Boat* is social history and musical history: when Nola gets her big break, it's with a lousy "coon song" she learned in the kitchen with the Negro domestics; whitey happily takes his cultural lead from the black man, even as he insists on the Negro's obvious inferiority. "In Dahomey," one could argue, is a counterweight to "Ol' Man River," an Act Two opener to balance the stevedores of the Act One opener. One could argue it for another ten pages, but it's only a three-minute song: the point is there are perfectly cogent intellectual underpinnings for Kern and Hammerstein's curtain-raiser. What's the justification for Prince's rewrite? "In Dahomey," the World's Fair, and Gay and Nola have gone. Instead, Nola gives birth to a daughter, and Parthy serenades the baby with "Why Do I Love You?"

But hang on: "Why Do I Love You?", in its whole identity, is a boy/girl song. It's the "happy interlude" beloved of motion pictures, a brief assertion of bliss whose very innocence foretells upheavals to come. It's fast, it's capering, it's an exhilarating dizzy wallow in the illogic of love:

> Why Do I Love You?
> Why do you love me?
> Why should there be two
> Happy as we?

Gay and Nola assume the answers to their questions. But, as events prove, nothing can be assumed. Take it away from them and you unbalance the play: the chief problem with this production is that you never feel, with the principal romance, that there's anything real at stake. But take it away and give it to Elaine Stritch as a lullaby to a baby, and you're just rubbing the authors' noses in it. Even slowed down as ponderously as here, this tune can never be a lullaby. Besides, the lyric just won't support it. A gran'ma wouldn't sing to a newborn babe:

> Can you see
> The why or wherefore
> I should be
> The one you care for?

It just ain't true. Then, in the final stretch, to shoehorn the damn song into place, Prince has to rewrite Hammerstein:

> You're a lucky boy
> I am lucky too
> All our dreams of joy
> Seem to come true . . .

Boy/joy/too/true: that's the rhyme scheme. Elaine Stritch sings:

> You're a lucky girl
> I am lucky too
> All our dreams of joy . . .

Does "girl" rhyme with "joy"? Even if you're not a lyric-writer, you can tell something's not quite right here: the words don't correspond to the rhythmic stresses of the tune. How come nobody—not his producer, Garth Drabinsky, not the orchestrator, Bill Brohn, not the seventy-plus cast, not the Rodgers and Hammerstein office—said to Prince, "Hey, man, you can't dump on the writers like that"?

What do you gain from giving "Why Do I Love You?" to Elaine Stritch? Nothing. But Miss Stritch, though not a star as we used to understand the term, is the biggest name in the cast, and, as Abe Burrows liked to say, a character who doesn't sing in a musical isn't really in the show. So, having cast Miss

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Stritch in the part, Prince has to find her a song. Hence the new second-act opener: star-pandering, and nothing more. If ever a "popular convention" was dated and "irrelevant," it's this. It's one thing to pander to Ethel Merman or Gwen Verdon: they did the work and sold the show. But to re-orient *Show Boat* so that a non-singing character can get a solo returns us to the theatrical dark ages—to the world Kern and Hammerstein set out to alter forever.

Does Prince's lyric-trampling matter? After all, on paper the song looks trite and simple-minded. Hammerstein, though, was never a droll rhymester like Hart and Ira Gershwin. He over-rhymes on "Why Do I Love You?" because the mood of the song is impossibly optimistic: the rhymes signal that the sentiment is too pat. Conversely, when he's got something big to say, he puts the rhyming dictionary back in his drawer. On that first night in '27, the miscegenation scene had a more immediate impact, but "Ol' Man River" is technically the more impressive: the suffering of a whole race compressed into one taut chorus—and not a rhyme until the tenth line ("cotton"/ "forgotten"). (Knowing when *not* to rhyme—when not to be too neat, too organized, too controlled—is something Hammerstein's pupil Stephen Sondheim has never quite got the hang of.)

It's not just about altering "lucky boy" to "lucky girl" because the gender of the object of affection has been amended. The great musicals are those which achieve a true coalescence of their constituent parts—book, music, lyrics, dance, design—but, even then, most of those elements are concerned with big gestures: the book bounces you along from A to B with a ruthless narrative shorthand, the music deals with emotional extremes. Such *detail* as exists in a musical is usually found in the lyrics. In his first draft of "Bill," P. G. Wodehouse, the pioneer colloquial lyricist of the American theater, wrote:

> . . . A motor car he cannot steer
> And it seems clear
> Whenever he dances
> His partner takes chances . . .

"Now that," Ira Gershwin would say enviously, "*that's* a lyric": an immaculately compressed character sketch, rendered rueful by the notes on which it sits. It's detail: it's what stops the best musicals being just up-and-down emotional rollercoaster rides for cardboard cut-outs. But, midst all the sound and fury, you need the rhyme to draw your attention to it. When Julie—ravaged by booze and disillusionment and fierce stubborn loyalty—sings "Bill" in *Show Boat*, the equivalent lines run:

> His form and face
> His manly grace
> Are not the kind that you
> Would find in a statue . . .

"That you"/ "statue." Lonette McKee sings "that *you*/ Would find in a *stat*ue"—such a perverse and stilted accenting that you have to assume she's been instructed to blow the rhyme. I don't mind, in principle, Prince reconstructing *Show Boat*, but I object to him lazily ignoring the authors' own standards of discipline. This is what's so unnerving about his first major revival. A distinguished British opera director once told me he could only see shows like *Phantom of the Opera* in places like Vienna or Budapest where the foreign language acted as a huge condom, protecting him from Lloyd Webber contamination. But you don't need to understand the language: Prince's staging is so bold and clear, there's nothing to be gained from listening to the vapid operetta generalities of the English text. American admirers of this director have always regarded *Phantom* as an aberration, but in some respects it's the ultimate Prince show, the piece in which he finally triumphed over the English language and proved the redundancy of words. *Show Boat*, alas, is not *Phantom*: you *need* the text. This revival is alarming because it suggests that America's most distinguished director can no longer hear the words.

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The media

The game as played in Burnsville

by James Bowman

Ken Burns is one of those people whose achievements appear to diminish in retrospect, and whose later work reveals the faults of their earlier efforts. After sitting through the whole eighteen-and-a-half-hour stretch of "Baseball," you can hardly help looking back at "The Civil War" and reflecting on the essential falseness of that soulful solo violin and catch-in-the-throat reading of letters whose pathos resided entirely in what subsequently happened to their authors. Yes, Ken, we know it is all very sad, but being sad is not what it was *for*. Somehow we never found out quite so much about that rather important question as a true history should have told us.

"Baseball," at half again the length of "The Civil War," is self-parody. Instead of the "Ashokan Farewell," there is a seemingly endless series of different arrangements of "The Star-Spangled Banner" and "Take Me Out to the Ball Game." The well-tried formula of "The Civil War," with lots of sepia-tinted photographs displayed against a background of plangent piano music and lugubrious narration, has now become a cliché, a sort of PBS house style. A couple of weeks after "Baseball" had run its seemingly interminable course, I tuned in a documentary on FDR and, hearing again that mournful piano and seeing Doris Kearns Goodwin talking, thought for a moment that they had decided to repeat "Baseball" instead.

But just as being sad was not what the Civil War was for, so being a mirror of America's social problems is not what baseball is for. Nor is being a metaphor for spiritual values. Nor is being a symbol of the American character. It is a game, an amusement, a diversion from the workaday realities in which the American character is actually worked out. No doubt it reflects that character as everything from television to cooking does, but it is a fundamental distortion of vision to forget as often and as systematically as Burns's series does that baseball is first and foremost a game. Burns treats it instead as a kind of alternative reality, as if you can live in Baseball instead of The World.

Everything about the series conspires to promote this view. One of its earnest commentators, the poet Donald Hall, writes of baseball as "a refuge from America" and a "going away from our daily lives." It is "connected with the past" but its history is self-contained. You "look at baseball and say: Daily Life is completely different from this." Well, yes and no. Daily Life is different in that it doesn't have the sort of neat closure that baseball has, a certainty as to outcome and an easy designation of success or failure, but it is not *ganz andere*. Baseball is not a world apart. It is contained in Daily Life and makes up, for those with a proper perspective on it, a fairly small proportion of it. To the Burns people it is the other way round: Daily Life is contained in baseball.

It is the immitigable smallness of baseball

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in the overall scheme of things that the Burns-style baseball fanatics cannot bear to contemplate. By making it into a world apart, they lose the sense of perspective. They have nothing to compare it to so it becomes of world-encompassing proportions. "It occurred to me," says Burns, "that if you were going to make a history of America since 1865 you'd probably have to depend largely on baseball for continuity. Think about it: What other thread runs so prominently through the last 130 years of American culture? . . . It reflects virtually every unpleasant aspect of American life: supercompetitivenesss, racial problems, labor strife, the transformation of games into big business. If a Martian landed on earth and wanted you to explain twentieth-century American life to him, you'd start by taking him to baseball games."

And indeed, it takes an almost Martian naïveté to treat baseball, as Burns does, as virtual reality. What possible instruction in American culture or history could be served by the sort of perspective on it that allows Burns to compare Marvin Miller—the lawyer who won for baseball players the right to free agency and thus multi-million-dollar contracts—to Abraham Lincoln because "he freed the players from the constraints that bound them to one team for life." Such ludicrous rhetorical excess is very far from aberrational in Burns's series, partly, perhaps, because of the recent tradition of florid and pretentious writing about the game which is associated with people like Roger Angell and the late Bartlett Giamatti.

In Burns's overblown prologue, for example, whiny-voiced John Chancellor informs us that baseball "reflects a host of age-old American tensions: between workers and owners, scandal and reform, the individual and the collective. It is a haunted game in which every player is measured against the ghosts of all who have gone before. Most of all it is about time and timelessness, speed and grace, failure and loss, imperishable hope and coming home." Once you have allowed a writer to get away with that kind of nonsense, you have few defenses left against the opinion of Gerald Early, a professor of black studies who is one of Burns's featured commentators, that "there are three things America will be known for in two thousand years: the Constitution, jazz music, and baseball."

This, I suppose, may be true in the same sense that what Rome is known for today is emperors, orgies, and gladiators. That it is is the measure of our own decline and degeneracy, which some thirty-eighth-century Gibbon may remark by citing not baseball but "Baseball." Of course it is true to say that the extravagance, the outrageousness of such rhetorical conceits is as genuinely an American tradition as baseball itself. At least as early as Walt Whitman we find similar dithyrambs to the effect that baseball is "America's game; a people's game just as important [as our Constitution and laws] in the sum total of our historic life." But Whitman was eccentric in his time. Such ideas take on a different cast now that the national pastime has become not baseball but narcissism—that is, a habit of attributing to our most trivial pleasures a cosmic significance.

Baseball philosophy and theology is a big part of "Baseball." Consider this gnomic comment from Roger Angell, who temporarily forgets that baseball is about time and timelessness, etc: "I think losing is what baseball is all about in the end."

But . . . but . . . for there to be a losing side there must also be a winning side, must there not? Is it not then just as much about winning? These questions irritate one like an unfilled tooth. Angell's Zen koan *may* mean nothing more than that you can't win all the time, or even almost all the time. But it suggests so much more. Likewise, when he tells us that the New York Mets, who went on losing through most of the 1960s, were "anti-matter to the Yankees, who always won" (while the Mets drew bigger crowds), he explains: "There is more Met than Yankee in all of us."

Except, presumably the Yankees. Or is there more Met than Yankee in them too? In which case what makes them Yankees rather than Mets? What is the sound of one hand

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clapping? The puzzle just grows more complex and insoluble the more you try to solve it. But it does provide irrefutable evidence of the very "deep" quality of Roger Angell's mind. And he is only one of the show's deep thinkers. There is a positive Murderer's Row of them, ready at a moment's notice to tell us, as Stephen Jay Gould does for example, that Bobby Thompson's home run that won the pennant for the Giants in 1951 was "the greatest moment of pure joy in my life." Since he cannot possibly mean this unless he is mad, a conclusion that his academic career argues firmly against, he must mean something subtler, more mystical by it. But I am not deep enough to find it out.

What is clear is that he is stressing the importance to the "Baseball" world view of feelings. Gerald Early does the same when he tells how, as a child playing sandlot baseball with his friends, he would take his cap off for the national anthem, just like the big-leaguers. "I don't think there was anything that made me feel American except baseball," he says—as if he could "feel" himself into some other nationality by virtue of non-baseball experience. For the world of baseball—the special baseball-reality in which the featured speakers in this series would live—is also the world of feelings. The game of baseball is what Alfred Hitchcock called the MacGuffin—the plot excuse (which could as easily have been something else) for eliciting certain feelings from the audience. And the feelings elicited by "Baseball" are part nostalgia (which Burns unconvincingly professes to hate) and part self-affirmation.

The self-affirmation is not only personal but political, and after the warm and fuzzy feelings the ones most frequently on display here are those of political self-righteousness. In particular, anything to do with race is made of overriding importance, and the indisputable hero of the series is Jackie Robinson. Burns himself has said: "There is not any one reason why we made the series, but if I had to give one I would say it was to tell of the life and career of Jackie Robinson."

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Even so usually level-headed an observer of the world as George Will says that Jackie Robinson is second only to Martin Luther King in the pantheon of black heroes and his pioneering of the integration of baseball "one of the great achievements in the annals of the human drama—anywhere, any time."

That's raising the moral stakes for you! Who but a racist would deny that being the first black man to play in the big leagues is an achievement on the order of, say, defeating the armies of the Third Reich. As Charles Krauthammer observes about another example of the sort of portentous bracketing of political, cultural, and baseball stars which the series is continually engaging in ("In the 1960s, Winston Churchill, Ernest Hemingway and Rogers Hornsby died"), "I suppose if Churchill had saved Western civilization from Nazism *and* batted .424, he might have merited a separate mention."

Nowhere is this failure to make distinctions more egregious than in the explicit connection Burns makes between the segregation of baseball before 1947 and the rise of fascism in Europe. He says that he learned to make it from something he saw at the Holocaust Museum which, if true, is disturbing evidence that the Holocaust Museum is in the business of trivializing the Holocaust. No doubt black people in America have had a rough time of it (though professional baseball players have not had so rough a time as most), but six million of them were not deliberately exterminated.

Of course it is clear enough that such bracketings of disparate people and events are simply part of the hype "Baseball" gives itself, the drawing of a moral aura about the game and its practitioners which can justify the importance it attributes to them. The results are sometimes quite comical, as when the story is told of the Jewish slugger Hank Greenberg of the Detroit Tigers who, on the last day of the season in 1938, was two home runs away from Babe Ruth's single-season home-run record. Bob Feller of the Cleveland Indians struck out eighteen Tigers that day, setting a new record and fanning Greenberg twice. "The next day," says John Chancellor's narration, "Adolf Hitler's army invaded Czechoslovakia." As Krauthammer says, Hitler must have been a Tigers fan.

What could Burns be thinking of in such witless juxtapositions? Something vaguely along the lines of its having been a bad week for the Jews, perhaps? In the same way, after Chancellor tells the famous story of Babe Ruth's "called shot" home run in the 1932 World Series, he goes on: "One month later, Franklin Roosevelt was elected president." Yes? And what exactly did this have to do with the called shot? Maybe that Roosevelt's election was a sort of political home run, a gamewinner, a unique achievement to be remembered forever after, like the called shot. But your guess is as good as mine. You have to be a deep thinker to understand it, I guess.

But what clearly emerges is the moral chiaroscuro of good and evil which the political comments of the series are designed to create. At the other extreme from Jackie Robinson there is Ty Cobb, who, in addition to having the highest lifetime batting average in history, was a pathological racist. Cobb is, says the contributor Daniel Okrent with an unfortunate choice of words, "the great black mark on the history of baseball" and "an embarrassment to baseball." The fact that he is remembered as much for his racial prejudices as he is for his 4,191 hits exaggerates his racism into one of the two most important things about him—something worth remembering, like an act of heroism. I do not wish to diminish the importance of racism, but, although there were a great many Americans living between 1886 and 1961 who would qualify today as thoroughgoing and wholly reprehensible racists, only one of them had a lifetime .367 batting average.

Actually, there seems to be some dispute about the most famous story about Ty Cobb. This has to do with his leaping into the stands to beat up a heckling fan who, it turned out, had no hands. When he was upbraided by a witness, Cobb shouted "I don't care if he has no feet," and continued

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punching him. According to Burns, this episode was inspired by the fan's having called him a "half nigger." But according to the recently published *Cobb: A Biography* by Al Stump, who collaborated with Cobb on a sanitized memoir thirty-odd years ago, the fan had called his mother a whore and his beating him up, though it led to his suspension, caused the congressional delegation from Georgia to commend Cobb for his defense of Southern womanhood.

Either way, the wise historian concludes that there are notable differences between our ancestors and ourselves—differences which, on the whole, it is better not to moralize any more than we can help. Otherwise we end up like the Burnsian "Baseball" team for whom history is little more than an excuse to reaffirm their own moral superiority. For these people, the love of baseball is a kind of compensation for the dislike of those who played and watched it for its first hundred years. This is their saving grace and their redeeming virtue. The historian John Thorn is quoted: "The lie of baseball is that all the inequalities of American life are checked at the door." Baseball has been as class- and race-ridden and has reflected as many disgraceful class and racial attitudes as any other American institution, but at least it is baseball.

Other political connections that Ken is keen to make range from the useful information that in the 1910s baseball became an alternative to labor agitation to the little-known fact that "Fidel Castro seized power in Cuba" partly as a consequence of having been "rejected by the Washington Senators because he didn't have a big-league arm." The latter is about as close to political incorrectness as "Baseball" comes, and, for the most part, it trades in standard left-wing attitudes. The egregious Daniel Okrent, for example, generously acknowledges that the owners' purging of gambling, drinking, and corruption from the game in the 1880s was not done for "entirely bad reasons," but it seems to him undeniable that this was "as much a historical cover story as it was a reality" since "like all good American businessmen they saw an opportunity."

Okrent is one of several Red Sox fans (Doris Kearns Goodwin is another) who make the Bosox the overwhelmingly favorite team of the pretentious intellectual. It is one of the mysteries of the universe whether they become Red Sox fans because they are pretentious or they become pretentious because they are Red Sox fans. "Fenway Park," says Okrent, "has been the scene of so much baseball . . ." and here he pauses modestly and judiciously—"tragedy *might* be too strong a word, but baseball sorrow—that it is like a Civil War battlefield, a vale of tears." But even this is small potatoes to John Thorn, whose sense of cosmic significance has somehow been awakened into hyperacuity: "Hit a ball into the ether," he says, "and it's going to come back to you. This is the promise of Everlasting Life: It's going to come back to you." It's enough to make a cat laugh.

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Books

Shakespeare & company

by Paul Dean

During his writing of *The Western Canon*,[1] Harold Bloom must have reflected wryly, more than once, on a remark he quotes from Johnson: "he that writes must be considered as a kind of general challenger, whom everyone has a right to attack." Pre-publication furor over the book centered on the well-publicized appearance, in an appendix, of a list of over 850 works representing the achievements of Western literature from the earliest times to the present day. This silly idea has inevitably led to profitless wrangling about the inclusion and exclusion of this or that author or work, and has distracted attention from Bloom's arguments. Accordingly, after this paragraph, I shall ignore the list. However, it does have one use. It reminds us of the Great Books, and of F. R. Leavis's characteristically bracing discussion of that madcap project in *Commentary* for 1953. Detecting behind it "the axiom that it is an offense against democracy to advocate for anybody anything that everybody can't have," Leavis declared: "If democratic equality of opportunity requires that standards should be lowered, then I am against democracy." So, in that sense, is Professor Bloom, who commits himself to the provocative view that "the strongest poetry is cognitively and imaginatively too difficult to be read deeply by more than a relative few of any social group, gender, race, or ethnic origin." Fortunately for literary criticism, Bloom himself belongs to the relative few of *all* these different socio-sexual categories.

Unlike many of Bloom's readers, I suspect, I do not find the concept of a canon intrinsically absurd. To me, as to Bloom —and to Leavis, whose insights are frequently echoed, without acknowledgment, in the book—the propositions that some works of literature are better than others, and that (as above) not everyone will be able to grasp fully what literature at its most difficult has to offer, are so self-evident as not to be worth discussing. Yet those propositions inspire widespread anger, even contempt. Bloom identifies as his enemies various groups which he collectively calls the School of Resentment: "Feminists, Marxists, Lacanians, New Historicists, Deconstructionists, Semioticians." They are ushering in, according to the classification of Vico which serves loosely as an organizing principle behind the book, a new Theocratic Age in which literary fundamentalism will exact adherence to sterile dogmas: "with political correctness replacing religious rightness, we are back with Tolstoy's polemic against difficult art." The Resenters' domination of the academy in America (and increasingly also, I may add, in Britain) has led to what Bloom calls "the Balkanization of literary studies," which he prophesies will soon relegate the traditional humane study of literature in universities to the status currently enjoyed (?) by Latin and Greek: but he observes

1 *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*, by Harold Bloom; Harcourt Brace, 578 pages, $29.95.

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acidly that this is not the disaster it might seem, because "only a few handfuls of students now enter Yale with an authentic passion for reading," and for the rest—rendered semi-literate by a predominantly visual "culture" which has eroded their attention span, stunted their power of conceptual thinking, and impoverished their linguistic skills—the literary classics are inaccessible. Where Bloom as a schoolboy analyzed *Julius Caesar*, students now, in two schools he knows, pass their time constructing cardboard shields and swords because the play is beyond them. *The Western Canon* is frankly offered as an elegy to books which may soon have no readers.

I share Bloom's pessimism about the future of literary criticism, and his intentions are not per se ridiculous, but I cannot endorse his book as wholeheartedly as I would like to. There are too many flaws in the conduct of the argument. Firstly, like any polemicist, he presents his opponents' position as extreme while disguising his own extremism. I heartily agree with him that "to read in the service of any ideology is . . . not to read at all." Yet beneath each subdivision of the School of Resentment lies a valid approach. It is simply that the Resenters take the part for the whole, as Bloom does in his turn. The experience of women, the pressures upon individuals of socio-economic institutions and practices, the artificiality of language as a symbolic system, and the historical context of works of art are all, and have for centuries been, legitimate objects of critical attention. Indeed all, without their School of Resentment labels, are engaged by Bloom himself at various points. (Was there ever a more impeccably semiotic pronouncement, for example, than his that "the meaning of a word is always another word"?) The fact is that a literary critic should be interested in the widest possible variety of human experience, and it is unwise to sneer at your opponents for drawing attention, however disproportionately, to aspects of that experience which you may have neglected. Furthermore, despite his disdain for the Christian classicism of T. S. Eliot, whom he ranks as "a minor critic compared to Johnson" (another Christian classicist, of course), Bloom's concept of a canon derives directly from Eliot's in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919): "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists." Eliot argues that, if a literature is to be vital, the arrival of significant new work will change the way we read the work which preceded it; there's no real paradox in his conclusion that "the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past." And Eliot in turn derives from Arnold, whose airy passing reference to "the five or six supreme poets of the world" no one would dare emulate now, not even Professor Bloom, who includes twenty-six writers, not all of them poets.

Bloom is, then, right to identify the formation of a canon with the development of a sense of tradition, and to stress the degree to which literary works build upon their predecessors and assume a readership acquainted with those. There is, however, little that is original about this idea, and in a better-educated world, where the standing of Dante, Milton, George Eliot, or Wordsworth were not imperiled, Bloom's book would have been unnecessary. Despite the appearance of rigor, it is sprawlingly organized, and leisurely to the point of prolixity in manner, so that an overview of his position is hard to achieve at first. Although he might have been content to call himself a liberal humanist—after all, that is damning enough in the present climate—he describes his stance as "aesthetic" in the tradition of Wilde and Pater. His understanding of aesthetics does violence to the genuine subtlety of those two writers. When he castigates "remorseless Puritans, for whom the beautiful in literature is only another version of the cosmetics industry," we may sympathize; but his histrionic espousal of a religion of art in which books are self-validating and need no connection with the external world—a belief

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which neither Wilde nor Pater would have endorsed—is an unnecessarily flamboyant gesture. Moreover, he insists on defining all literary merit in terms of characterization—and characterization depends on our referring what is in the text to some world external to the text, so that he contradicts himself. Beneath his incompatible premises lurks a romanticism which frequently topples over into posing and self-indulgence.

The concentration on characterization is a major weakness. Of course literature, if about human experience, is necessarily about the individual person, and I share Bloom's distaste for the abstractions and impersonalisms which are the stock-in-trade of contemporary theory. As he wittily says, "Social energies exist in every age, but they cannot compose plays, poems, and narratives." But when he refers to "the virtual reality of literary characters," I am uneasy; and when he asserts that "Shakespeare's greatest originality is in representation of character," so that we feel as if Falstaff, Edmund, or Hamlet could "get up and walk on out of their plays"—or when he tells us that "Mr. Pickwick remains the archetypal Dickens character" or that "Proust's greatest strength, amid so many others, is his characterization"—I have to protest that these are distortions and oversimplifications. Shakespeare (who, together with Dante, is made by Bloom the touchstone of all Western literature) cannot be understood through one aspect of his art only: *Hamlet* consists of other characters besides Hamlet, and of other elements besides character. Falstaff is glorious, but a kingdom run by him would be a disaster. Bloom does not like detractors of Falstaff (and hence prefers Maurice Morgann to Dr. Johnson on that subject, since even Johnson's encomium contains some criticisms), but how can he avoid including among them the William Shakespeare who made sure that Falstaff did *not* have the laws of England at his commandment? Again, to make Pickwick the central Dickens character is to revive the old orthodoxy (untenable at least since the Leavises' book of 1970) of Dickens as primarily a great entertainer, offering cheery escapism, colorful caricatures, picaresque plots, and universal benevolence. (In fact, in another example of inconsistency, Bloom concentrates on *Bleak House* and writes about it quite well.) Yet again, the center of *A la recherche du temps perdu* is the narrator, who is a "character" but more significantly a consciousness embracing all the other characters: and Bloom himself argues that Proust virtually abolishes the concept of character as traditionally understood in Western literature, drawing nearer to the meditative texts of the East.

Bloom wants from literature what he more than once calls the Blessing—the zest for life; but to want this and only this from the Wife of Bath, or Falstaff, or Peer Gynt, or Pickwick, or Molly Bloom, is to want only part (and not necessarily the most important part) of what their creators have accomplished. Neither life nor literature consists entirely of comedy; the puzzlingly bracing effects of non-comic art forms have been acknowledged since Aristotle's time, and Bloom's bias invites accusations that he is trivializing. We are not surprised when he acclaims G. K. Chesterton as the best critic of Chaucer and Dickens; Chesterton's studies of those writers are not negligible, but their period flavor is inexpungable. The perverse verdict is easily accounted for; Bloom, like Chesterton, is an instinctive celebrant rather than a systematic thinker.

Bloom's generosity of spirit is not so common nowadays that we can afford to dismiss it out-of-hand, nor does his childlike honesty—as when he admits to weeping with Esther Summerson—deserve superior sneers. Both, nonetheless, lead him to some extraordinary inflationary valuations and to some patently empty rhetorical gestures masquerading as judgments. A list of these will suggest the unevenness of touch, the vagaries of logic, which so limit the book's success.

Of Shakespeare's thirty-eight plays, twenty-four are declared to be masterpieces, but we are not told which they are or why the other fourteen lose out. (Not enough characters?)

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Unlike Calderon, Shakespeare is judged not to be a religious dramatist, which Bloom thinks means the same as saying that his plays are not Christian allegories (it doesn't); the later comments that the *Divine Comedy*, "like all of the greatest canonical works destroys the distinction between sacred and secular writing" and that "in high literature, I doubt that secularization has ever taken place," seem to me applicable to Shakespeare too, although for Bloom to admit this would involve another contradiction. (We note that Kafka is included in the book although he is "in no way a religious writer" whose "desperation" is nonetheless "primarily spiritual.") We are told that *The Canterbury Tales* is a "more original and canonical work" ("*more* canonical"?) than *Troilus and Criseyde*, I suppose because there are, again, more characters in the *Tales*; but, if originality is a meaningful value, the argument for *Troilus*'s superiority in that respect is surely more compelling. Satan, who is "granted more of a Shakespearean growing inner self," is the real redeemer of *Paradise Lost* for Bloom, who once again therefore won't take the work of art on any terms but his own. Johnson is "unmatched by any critic in any nation before or after him"; Whitman, while "admittedly not Shakespeare, or Dante, or Milton, compares very powerfully with any Western writer from Goethe or Wordsworth to the present"; "Blake had no effect upon Dickens"; Iris Murdoch "cannot *often* sustain direct comparison with George Eliot" (my italics); Tolstoy's *Hadji Murad* is "the best story in the world, or at least the best that I have ever read," and is preferred to *Anna Karenina* as *Peer Gynt* is preferred to *Ghosts* and (a less clear-cut case, I admit) *Endgame* to *Waiting for Godot*; Freud is "possibly the best mind of our century" and Virginia Woolf "the most complete person-of-letters in England in our century"; Joyce's playing with language in *Finnegans Wake* is so intense that he "could be confounded with the language-mad Shakespeare of *Love's Labour's Lost*."

It's difficult to know where to start in replying to these wild and unsubstantiable claims—and perhaps it would be futile to explain to Bloom, for instance, what makes a serious comparison between George Eliot and Iris Murdoch impossible. He indicates the answer, in fact, when he describes Eliot, correctly, as "the novelist as thinker (not philosopher)"—the bracketed noun applies to Murdoch and explains her inferiority. Again, would there be any point in showing him how Shakespeare's complete *control* over what he is doing with language in *Love's Labour's Lost* makes him both the reverse of "language-mad" and the antithesis of Joyce? The futility would lie in the fact that Bloom is not really conducting an argument at moments like this, he is just making noises.

What, then, can be said in Bloom's favor? The rewards of *The Western Canon* derive not from a sense of coherence, for little architectonic power is displayed, but from shorter passages of insight. A useful line is traced—erratically, through seven chapters—from Chaucer's Pardoner to Iago and Edmund, who "contemplates himself objectively as a work of art" (yet this ignores his final repentance), and thence to Milton's Satan and Dostoevsky's nihilists—all manifestations of "negative energy." There are good remarks on the massive egotism of Dante, who never "heard God in any voice but his own," and the comparable quality in Milton, whose Jesus is nearer to the American than the European model, and in Tolstoy, whose sense of his own divinity dwarfed that of the only version of Christ he could feel comfortable with; on the ending of *Faust, Part Two* as a unique revival of Aristophanean comedy—both influences combining in *Peer Gynt*; on the Shakespearean quality of Jane Austen's irony; on *Krapp's Last Tape* as "Wordsworth's last stand" in its exploration of the role of memory in preserving selfhood; on the affinities between the comedy of Jonson and Dickens and on the immense superiority of Dickens's nightmare world to Poe's; on the preferability of a Shakespearean reading of Freud to a Freudian reading of Shake-

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speare—who anticipated all Freud's best ideas; on the androgynous, rather than homosexual, character of Proust's imagination; and on Beckett as a dramatist of Shakespearean impact—in view of the perceptive discussion of Shakespearean echoes in *Endgame* it's odd that Bloom misses the influence of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* on *Godot*, both plays about receding planes of reality in which characters are simultaneously dreamers and dreams. Bloom admits at one point that he prefers reading poetry to any other art form, and when he focuses his attention on specific poems or passages he can be very astute, as on the Marlovian element in Milton's blank verse, or on the sublimity of Emily Dickinson. It's a pity that his encyclopedic learning will not permit him to read more carefully more often.

Bloom's book addresses a situation which he rightly regards as desperate, whose history I should like to glance at briefly in closing. The existence of a canon stretches back a long way. Chaucer's clerk, it may be remembered, owned "twenty bookes, clad in blak or red," including Aristotle. How many Chaucer (or Shakespeare) owned we do not know. We do know that the Earl of Warwick (died 1359) left forty-two books in his will, the Duke of Gloucester (died 1397) nearly twice as many. Instances occur of a fourteenth-century knight owning nineteen books; merchants too bequeathed them. Sir John Paston in 1482 owned books of Arthurian and other romance, a historical chronicle, a book (probably Chaucer's) about Troilus, a book on chess, legal texts, and some moral philosophy by Cicero.[2] In the seventeenth century most people in England who could read at all owned copies of the Authorized Version of the Bible, the works of Shakespeare, Chaucer, and Milton, plus Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. These books alone, known virtually by heart, gave their possessors a greater degree of literacy than can be claimed by many of the most distinguished products of the modern university system. What is crucial about these books is the degree of homogeneity of reading experience which they imply. When literacy is limited and books are few, and when there is a general agreement about which books matter, a national literature may grow in a coherent and organic way. A canon is not under threat because there are more books—so that, as Bloom remarks, the question "What shall I read?" has been replaced by "What shall I not bother to read?"—for the existence of a literate public, versed in the classics of its national literature and attuned to their traditions, is not a matter of how many books people read, but of how intelligent has been their reading of such books as they have read. Literature, now a subbranch of academic criticism, must spawn instant classics, or the professors will be out of a job. And an instant classic can be conveniently instantly forgotten and replaced by another instant classic. It's no accident that when Bloom comes to the modern period his book is at its weakest. Nobody without an ideological axe to grind is going to quarrel with his inclusion of Milton or Dickens, but when he adds Borges and Neruda legitimate queries can be raised. Once, a classic was a book which had stood the test of time: but what do we do in an age which won't allow time to be a medium for growth, declaring instead that the past is unknowable?—or when, in the name of democracy, an elite denounces Bloom for elitism because it differs from him about which books are important? By reacting to his book simply by quarreling with his list, his critics belittle, at the same time as they exemplify, the genuine cultural chaos to which he seeks to call attention.

The canon presumes the maintenance of an elite—of both books and readers—and it can forcefully be argued that such an entity is essential for cultural and social health. Professor Lincoln Allison, of the British University of Warwick, published in the London *Independent* newspaper for August 9, a trenchant article on the folly of expanding the higher

2 This information is taken from Maurice Keen, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages 1348–1500* (1990), pages 218–221.

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education system in Britain, where the undergraduate population now constitutes 31 percent of the relevant age-group as against 13 percent a decade ago. Allison observes that

> the paradox of elitism can be summarised as this: if 3 percent of the population are allowed to possess a qualification, the world is better off than if 30 percent do. Not only does society possess the culture and skills attached to the qualification and get the benefit of them, but there is plenty of room for self-esteem and employment among the 97 percent. Exclusion from an elite as big as 30 percent is far more damaging, however. Suddenly, no skills count without a degree . . . . The rhetoric of "greater opportunities" is actually a lie: 30 percent university education creates a 70 percent underclass without corresponding benefits to the 30 percent.

So also in cultural terms. There are limits to the extent to which Shakespeare or Dante can be explained to someone so that they can still be said to have a valid understanding of those authors. Once the stage of the cartoon-book modern-English Shakespeare has been reached, Shakespeare is no longer being read. Of the possible solutions to this problem the most obvious—that Shakespeare can, and should, be studied only by those likely to be able to understand him, who have proved their ability by passing formal tests for university entrance—is anathema to modern democracy, which therefore adopts either the solution of watering down Shakespeare until he is Shakespeare no longer, or declaring that, in fact, he *isn't* necessary to a genuine education, or may even be a barrier to it on the grounds that he is sexist, racist, imperialist, or whatever, and may thus poison the minds of the young. When this evasion is multiplied a hundredfold, the Western canon ceases to exist. Professor Bloom thinks this is a shocking state of affairs, and I agree with him. Unfortunately, his book cannot back his humane and benevolent intentions with an argument of real intellectual distinction, so it will be all too easy for it to be dismissed by those whom he is right to fear.

Inspired by Martial

D. R. Shackleton Bailey, editor & translator
Martial: Epigrams. Vol. I, 425 pages; Vol. II, 419 pages; Vol. III, 390 pages.
Loeb Classical Library/
Harvard University Press, $16.95 each

reviewed by Charles Tomlinson

Within this writer's own lifetime, Latin has disappeared in Britain as a requirement for entry into university. The publication of a new edition in the renowned Loeb Classical Library of the poems of Martial—Latin verse and English prose *face à face*—affords the pleasant reflection that someone somewhere is still studying the language, and also offers an occasion for thinking about the way Martial's presence shows itself in English poetry and about the poet in person.

A reliable English version is always good to possess and here we have one that gives us access to many a dark and difficult corner of the original Latin. To anyone, like myself, who has only fitfully kept up his Latin, I cannot exaggerate the usefulness of an unpretentiously accurate approach to the meaning such as this. It helps the reader to the mental possession of the original and it also makes one conscious anew of how splendidly some of our English poets responded to Martial.

Marcus Valerius Martialis was born round about A.D. 40 at Bibilis in Spain, a sort of first-century Pittsburgh, famous for its iron mines and the manufacture of steel, and a center of Roman culture. Like most cities in the ancient world, Bibilis lay within easy access of the countryside and when, in later life, Martial returned there, a local patroness whom he refers to as Marcella provided him with a rural property that sounds rather like Horace's Sabine retreat.

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Patronage was a lifelong necessity and concern for Martial, who, having left Bibilis for Rome in 64, soon abandoned the idea of a career in law for a career as a writer of epigrams. Compliments in verse, addressed to prospective patrons, may have formed the staple of his early poetry, which has vanished. Later poems make much play with the stinginess of those who provide or fail to provide handouts.

The time of Marital's arrival in Rome was not an auspicious one if, as is likely, he sought for help from the house of Seneca, another Spaniard and tutor to the emperor, Nero. For no sooner had Martial set foot in the capital than Seneca was forced by his former pupil to commit suicide, after having been involved in an unsuccessful plot against Nero. Another writer, Lucan, author of *Pharsalia* and Seneca's nephew—"Rome's last great epic poet," as Dana Gioia described him in these pages—perished in the aftermath of the same foiled conspiracy.

So Martial was on his own, and we must not, in our protective age, dwell too insistently on his propensity to flatter those in power. Among these was another monster, the Emperor Domitian, who granted Martial the *ius trium liberorum*, the Right of Three Children, that is to say the important privileges of a citizen who had three children—Martial had none. The poet's shameless petition for this appears in his second book of epigrams. Ben Jonson in "To the Ghost of Martial" wittily flatters James I while disapproving of the other poet's flattery:

> Martial, thou gav'st far nobler epigrams
> To thy Domitian, than I can my James.
> But in my royal subject I pass thee;
> Thou flatterd'st thine, mine cannot flattered be.

In his first book, *On the Spectacles*, Martial had already sung the praises of the public shows presented by the Emperor Titus along with the Colosseum he had built. Later, the poet reflected on the gloomy form of that structure and, by implication, the gloomy goings-on inside it. He also went back on his praise for Domitian, to whom, after his assassination, the senate had refused public burial. But it was becoming too late for Martial to ingratiate himself with rulers like the milder Nerva and the military Trajan, and in the year 100 he returned to Spain, to spend his declining years at Bibilis. The rural retreat he had long sung in verse he now had in his native place. But he was not content, though protesting his happiness to his friend Juvenal, who remained in the capital he missed.

I first heard about Martial while reading Subsidiary Latin at school. This was from an older boy who was doing Scholarship Latin (which meant he might, if lucky, obtain a scholarship that would send him to university). I gathered that Martial was one of the filthiest writers who had ever lived and mentioned sexual practices which were a mystery to us. This had troubled his nineteenth-century readers, too. However, Henry G. Bohn, in his 1865 edition of Martial in English, writes by way of moral counter-offensive, "It must be premised that his constant and severe castigation of the two grand vices which prevailed in his time . . . has given him the reputation of an obscene poet." The two grand vices? Martial sometimes writes of sodomy and of fellatio, but he is not much exercised by these in moral terms and, *pace* Bohn, often deals with them in a somewhat carefree manner. He is repetitious here and can be boring. Bohn, in his edition, used a 1782 Italian translation of those poems he considered obscene and dangerous for the unqualified person to read. This practice also persisted in the Loeb Library up to W. C. A. Ker in 1925, though in reprints plain English was silently substituted. D. R. Shackleton Bailey, in this latest and thorough edition, has rephrased the translations from Italian and used as many four-letter words as he thinks fit. The trouble with that blunt instrument "fuck" is that it remains so musically invariable—an "s" is about all you can add to it in the present tense, whereas in Latin (even without counting fancy things like subjunctives)

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futuere possesses six variations in the present indicative.

Some of the obscene poems are downright funny, others—despite their metrical expertise—of a schoolboy crudity. One of the very best, the comically un-P.C. XI, 104—instructions to a wife on going to bed—exists in an excellent modern verse translation by Peter Porter (*After Martial*, 1972). Even this boisterous affair was kept in Italian until our own days: "Moglie mia va fuori, o pratica i nostri costumi." [1] Graglia's eighteenth-century prose achieves a rather fine onset with something of the thrust of real verse. I do not know about Graglia's general accuracy as a translator, but in Bohn's extracts his versions are as readable as any I have come across, consistent in idiom and rhythmically convincing.

Martial writing in person about his risqué poems (XI, 16) is more charmingly funny than *they* sometimes are. In the seventeenth century, Herrick showed the right lightness of touch in his English rendering:

> To read my Book the Virgin shy
> May blush (while Brutus standeth by),
> But when he's gone, read through what's writ,
> And never stain a cheek for it.

Of that other body of poems—those that complain of patrons and of the stingy meals they provide—Peter Porter has given us some amusing versions, whose snap and crackle rise above those indispensable plain prose renderings such as in Bohn or Loeb. Of Mancinus in I, 43,

> this was the order of dishes
> you pampered us with:
> NO late-gathered grapes
> NO apples sweet as honeycomb
> NO ponderous pears lashed to the branch
> NO pomegranates the colour of blowing
> roses . . .

The American J. V. Cunningham is Porter's equal in some of the briefer epigrams and in his own imitations of Martial's manner—his gigolo, adept "with either sex at either end," is a very Martial-like invention.

Some of those anti-patron poems (as with their opposites, the poems on friendship) are in a vein that brings the full force of Martial's imagination into play. There is at least one of them that anticipates the imaginative inventiveness of a Swift or a Pope, even perhaps a Lewis Carroll, XI, 18. The gist of this comes over in a prose version, but verse takes it up a notch. There is no translation to match Ben Jonson's, Sir John Denham's, or Abraham Cowley's of other poems, but Bohn has tracked down an anonymous publication of 1856:

> Lupus, a farm near town you gave to me;
> A larger plot I in my window see;
> Such scrap of earth a *farm* 'twere hard to prove,
> When one small rue-plant makes Diana's
> grove.
> This, which a locust's wing might overlay!
> Whose crops would feed an ant one single day!
> This, which a folded rose-leaf might have
> crown'd,
> Where not a herb can any more be found
> Than eastern scents or fragrant spices rare
> To please the palate or perfume the hair:
> Where e'en a cucumber must crooked lie;
> A snake to coil its tail would vainly try.
> Such garden scarce one caterpillar feeds.
> The willow bed no second insect breeds . . .
> The devastated land a mouse lays low . . .

And so it goes on, with a deliberate delight in the absurdity of scale which quite exceeds any desire to satirize or complain. The imagination has made its own place of this minute estate, one that you might dream of visiting, like Alice's looking-glass world, or like Pope's when he imagines the giant girl in his friend Swift's book searching desperately for her charge, the lost Gulliver. It is not so much her desperation that matters as the poetry made possible by the distortion of scale. Here the local topography of Brobdignag, to Glumdalclitch as minute as Martial's farm, is of jungle-like extent to Gulliver:

1 "Wife, get out of it, or give us what we're used to."

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Dost thou bewilder'd wander all alone
In the green thicket of a mossy stone . . .
Dost thou, embosom'd in the lovely rose
Or sunk within the peach's down, repose?

There is an imaginative generosity in Martial's poem on a patron's meanness, and this generosity of mind shows nowhere more richly than in III, 58, which celebrates his friendship with Faustinus, whose Baian villa reconciles beauty and use, grain "tightly crammed in every corner and many a wine jar . . . fragrant with ancient vintages." Faustinus is a good landlord and master surrounded by reconnaissant neighbors. In the Shackleton Bailey version,

> Nor does the country caller come empty-handed. He brings pale honey with its comb and a cone of milk from the woods of Sassina; one proffers drowsy dormice, another the bleating offspring of a hairy dam . . . Strapping daughters of honest tenant farmers present their mothers' gifts in wicker baskets.

How all this struggles to get itself into verse, moving toward octosyllabics and two iambic pentameters in Shackleton Bailey's prose! Bohn, who aims to print a translation in verse whenever he can find one, comes up with what he labels "Old Ms. 16th Cent.":

No farmer there doth empty handed goe
To visit you.—One honny in a combe,
Another curds and creame from his owne
home
By th' next wood's side; some sleepy dormice
give,
A kidd, or capons forcèd chaste to live;
And with their baskets the plumpe girles are
sent
Their mothers' gifts and service to present.

Was Bohn's author actually writing after the turn of the century, and had he perhaps read the poem that truly translates—carries over—Martial into English and into the English scene, Ben Jonson's praise of the Sidney household, "To Penshurst"?

. . . all come in, the farmer and the clown:
And no one empty handed, to salute
Thy lord and lady, though they have no suit.
Some bring a capon, some a rural cake,
Some nuts, some apples; some that think they
make
The better cheeses, bring 'em; or else send
By their ripe daughters, whom they would
commend
This way to husbands . . .

Penshurst, like Faustinus's farm, is the great good place that never was on sea or land, something to stretch the imagination in Jonson's course for civilizing English aristocrats. In other poems he is quite frank about what he expects from Sir This or Sir That. Here, the ideal is not too ideal, and when the king and his son turn up at Penshurst unexpectedly, the lord and lady of the house aren't wholly ready for them—"What (great I will not say, but) sudden cheer," comments Jonson. It was Martial who enabled Jonson's almost laid-back sense of opulence, encouraged his zest for the specific (listing foods in "Inviting a Friend to Supper," as Martial likes to do), inspired him via those complaints about being invited to an aristocrat's house but not getting the same food as the master, or even sitting at the same table—to a series of generous opposites that can be expected at Penshurst,

Where comes no guest, but is allowed to eat,
Without his fear, and of the lord's own meat . . .
Here no man tells my cups; nor standing by,
A waiter, doth my gluttony envy . . .

Martial is relocated in an English setting, after more than a thousand years. Pope, in a vein close to Jonson, can equal Martial's complaints in the grotesque dinner episode of the visit to Timon's Villa in "Epistle to Lord Burlington." He, too, is a son not only of Ben but of Martial.

Jonson, by way of imitation, commandeers Martial for his own quarrel with the architect and designer of masques Inigo Jones, refashioning the Roman poet's insulting epigram on Ligurra (XII, 61) and

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achieving a comparably concise put-down. It is in an instance like this that one sees how right Bohn was to look for a verse equivalent to his plain prose versions. Of course, this was easier to do in his case, since, unlike the Loeb, he does not print the valuable addition of the Latin text, and so has more room. He finds some good examples from Oldham, Sedley, Byron, even Thomas Moore. Some of the best of all are by Cowley, who stands next to Jonson in sheer finesse of handling and to whom I shall return later on.

Bohn helps one see how Martial entered English poetry down the centuries, but he comes to grief by reprinting acres of the abominable Elphinston, a poetaster whose version of the epigrams once seemed important. Bohn even admits that these versions are "very indifferent, to say no worse of them." Clearly there were not enough good translations to further his laudable intentions.

The century and more that has elapsed since his edition would not afford him much help, as anyone will realize who has leafed through the dreary obscenities and the flaccid diction evident in *Epigrams of Martial Englished by Divers Hands*, edited by J. P. Sullivan and Peter Whigham (1987). I must quote Marvin Mudrick on modern translators of Chaucer: "The moral seems to be that the Augustans were the last English poets who had a sufficiently large command of technique and decorum, and sufficient trust in the versatility of their idiom, to be capable of turning [and here I must replace Mudrick's Chaucer with] Martial into a contemporary." We can take Ben Jonson as the founding father of the Augustan tradition and Byron as its dissolute heir. Even an Augustan as minor as Elijah Fenton can produce a lively imitation of Martial's manner:

> Milo's from home; and, Milo being gone,
> His lands bore nothing, but his wife a son:
> Why she so fruitful, and so bare the field?
> The land lay fallow, but the wife was till'd.

Porter and Cunningham—there are few others—achieve their happiest results by finding a modern equivalent for Augustan wit.

Martial wrote a number of poems on the deaths of children—a barber's boy, a boy stabbed through the throat by an icicle falling from overhead, a six-year-old slave girl called Erotion. Porter has an excellent version of IV, 18, the icicle episode. His attempt at the greatest of the three—perhaps Martial's greatest short poem, the one on the death of Erotion (V, 34)—fails, as all versions I have seen of this poem fail. Porter pops in details from other poems, as if this one were not good enough in itself, and his dragging free verse does not help much either. We seem to have lost the art of genuine pathos, controlled as Martial's is by the handling of meter, of sound and sense. Here is the Loeb's prose:

> To you, father Fronto and mother Flaccilla, I commend this girl, my pet and darling. Little Erotion must not be frightened by the dark shades and the monstrous mouths of Tartarus' hound. She was due to complete the chills of a sixth midwinter, no more, if she had not lived that many days too few. Let her now play and frolic with her old patrons and lispingly chatter my name. Not hard be the turf that covers her soft bones, be not heavy upon her, earth; she was not heavy upon you.

The syntax of the third sentence here, clear in the Latin, gets contorted in English, and I am not sure that "my pet and darling" is much of an improvement on Bohn's less gushing "my joy and delight." The archaism of "Not hard be" and "be not heavy" isn't really prepared for by the more or less modern register of the rest. Archaism dogs Shackleton Bailey elsewhere ("look you," "would fain," "wont to," "is a-wooing," "not found therein," "do you not think," the use of the obsolete subjunctive as in "pray that it not please too much.") However, this version gives a sketch of Martial's intentions and doesn't commit the sort of errors of taste K. Flower Smith is guilty of:

> She's such a little lassie—only six—
> To toddle down the pathways to the Styx
> All by herself!

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It's precisely that note Martial avoids. The poem is heartfelt, but does not wear its heart on its sleeve. I used to imagine, perhaps sentimentally also, that Erotion (a love child, hence her name) was a love child of Martial's own. Shackleton Bailey is surely nearer the mark in his comment on the touching introduction of the poet's own parents, that Erotion might have been a memory from Martial's young days in Bibilis. But he sensibly adds that the poem might well be a "figment" (perhaps "fiction" would have been a kinder word).

It took a great poet to do anything in English with Erotion. And this was not in a direct translation, but by incorporating a memory of the poem, and some of its vocabulary, into a lament that was wrenchingly personal—that for the death of Ben Jonson's own daughter, Mary:

> Here lies to each her parents' ruth,
> Mary, the daughter of their youth . . .
> This grave partakes the fleshly birth.
> Which cover lightly, gentle earth.

Jonson very consciously metamorphoses the original into a Christian poem—there is no Cerberus here—and the child's name is part of this process:

> Mary, the daughter of their youth . . .
> Whose soul heaven's queen (whose name she bears)
> In comfort of her mother's tears
> Hath placed amongst her virgin train . . .

This loveliest of all Jacobean laments does not exhaust Jonson's debt to Martial. He concludes the poem on the death of his son which, like that on Mary, is both lament and traditional Christian *consolatio*, with:

> Rest in soft peace, and asked, say here doth lie
> Ben Jonson his best piece of poetry.
> For whose sake, henceforth, all his vows be such
> As what he loves may never like too much.

The final couplet is a borrowing from Martial VI, 29, a lament on the death of a loved child servant: "quidquid ames, cupias non placuisse nimis" ("whatever you love, pray that it doesn't please too much"). Jonson's epitaph on Salomon Pavy, the boy actor of old men, reads:

> And did act (what now we moan)
> Old men so duly,
> As, sooth, the Parcae thought him one,
> He played so truly.

We track him once more in Martial's snow. In X, 53, Martial laments the death of the thirty-year-old Scorpus, "the glory of the circus": "Envious Lachesis [the Fate among the Parcae who assigns to a man his term] . . . counting my victories, believed me an old man." The beauty of this kind of allusion is something we largely forgo in our Latinless present.

Martial's true Penshurst world was the villa of and the precious hours spent with his friend, Julius Martialis (IV, 64). The meaning of friendship and the human waste which is its obverse, are the last of Martial's themes I now have space to touch on. His friend's place has all the frank largesse of the Sidneys' acres, but there is nothing about a happy peasantry in Martial here (they are kept out of sight) or the functional nature of a properly run estate. You cannot hear the traffic on the Flaminian and Salarian Way, or the noise of the boatmen's cries on the nearby Tiber. All is courtesy and liberality, and the landscape an emblem of those qualities of ease and friendship the poet most admires. Shackleton Bailey complains that "Martial's idea of living seems to have amounted to little more than loafing." But the man who wrote more than fifteen hundred poems could not have been loafing all the time—perhaps needed to loaf at times, with a nervous system keyed to major effort. What he seems to have regretted most was time not spent in the company of friends like his namesake—time consumed in playing the Roman games of opportunism and dining out. He dreams (in V, 20) of "carefree days" when both he and Mar-

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tialis would "have leisure for true living"—true loafing, as Shackleton Bailey might say—"riding, chatting, books, the Field, the colonnade . . ." Then they would know nothing of "the halls and mansions of the great." Instead, however, "We feel our good days slip away and leave us." Putting off until tomorrow what life and the riches of friendship offer was a theme Horace had already rehearsed in his Epodes, poems Martial obviously admired:

> Our yesterday's tomorrow now is gone.

The translator of that line of Horace was the poet destined to feel most keenly the force of Martial's own regrets—Abraham Cowley:

> Life for delays and doubts no time does give,
> None ever yet made haste enough to live.
> (II, 90)

Excelled only by Jonson, Cowley can reach the true Martialian note, especially on this theme, as in his version of V, 59:

> Tomorrow you will live, you always cry,
> In what far country does this tomorrow lie,
> That 'tis so mighty long ere it arrive?
> Beyond the Indies does this morrow live?
> 'Tis so far fetch'd this morrow, that I fear
> 'Twill be both very old and very dear.
> Tomorrow I will live, the fool does say:
> Today itself's too late; the wise liv'd yesterday.

Cowley makes one of the great English poems out of the piece I have already quoted from in fragments of Shackleton Bailey's helpful prose, V, 20. There is a certain amount of Augustan tidying up of the original, but this is a true rediscovery of a past poem's insight, just as Martial was rediscovering and reworking some of the most ungainsayable reflections from Horace's Epodes—in Pope's phrase, "What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd." Cowley greatly expands Martial's fourteen lines, so I must be content to end with merely a sample:

> If, dearest friend, it my good fate might be
> T'enjoy at once a quiet life and thee,
> If we for happiness could leisure find,
> And wand'ring time into a method bind,
> We should not, sure, the great men's favour need,
> Nor on long hopes, the court's thin diet, feed,
> We should not patience find to daily hear
> The calumnies and flatteries spoken there,
> We should not then lords' tables humbly use,
> Or talk in ladies' chambers love and news;
> But books and wise discourse, gardens and fields,
> And all the joys that unmixt Nature yields.
> Thick summer shades, where winter still does lie,
> Bright winter fires that summer's part supply.

Haunted by Science

E. L. Doctorow The Waterworks. Random House, 253 pages, $23

reviewed by Gerald Weissmann

Il y a à parier que tout idée publique, toute convention recue, est une sottise, car elle convenue au plus grand nombre.

It's safe to bet that every public idea, all conventional wisdom, is foolish because it is acceptable to the mass.
—Chamfort

The French epigraph begins Edgar Allan Poe's review of Longfellow's ballads in *Graham's Magazine* of March/April 1842. It seems equally appropriate to E. L. Doctorow's new novella *The Waterworks*, in which a free-lance writer and critic named Martin Pemberton serves as a stand-in for Poe. The book is set in 1871, twenty-one years after Poe's death of alcoholism in Baltimore. Pemberton has disappeared from the streets of New York, soon after he had gotten into a literary row with the Brahmins who presided over the Flowering of New England. Pemberton's editor, McIlvaine, who serves as narrator of *The Waterworks*, receives a packet of journals from his boss which includes:

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> . . . the latest issue of that organ of Brahmin culture, the *Atlantic Monthly*, [with] an article by no less a personage than Oliver Wendell Holmes. Holmes was railing at certain ignorant New York critics who were not sufficiently in awe of his fellow trinomials of New England literary genius, James Russell Lowell, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Though he didn't identify the offending critics, it was clear from his references that Martin Pemberton was one of them—I had run his piece on the subject early in the year, in which he had said of those men, and Mr. [*sic*] Holmes with them, that their names were too long for the work they produced.

The passage is a good clue to what Doctorow is up to in *The Waterworks*, an artful pastiche of a Poe tale of terror and the imagination. Pemberton's father, a Civil War profiteer, slave-runner, and master of a gloomy Hudson River mansion called *Raven*wood, has been long dead and buried, but Martin has seen him alive again and carted about the city in a horse-drawn omnibus. Martin succeeds in finding his father, who, together with other aging capitalists, has been kept alive by a sinister physician-scientist named Dr. Sartorius. Sartorius ("tailor" or *schneider*) is one of a distinguished line of medical threats to belletristic culture: good chunks of Drs. Frankenstein, Moreau, and Caligari pop up in the book. The good doctor is keeping the senior citizens puffing around a sci-fi Xanadu hidden among the waterworks of the Croton reservoir. The old boys have been rejuvenated by means of vital fluids and cells extracted from the still-living bodies of abducted street-orphans. Martin himself becomes captive of the evil doctor, and witnesses the exchange of youth for age:

> And what was this work, at least as I could fathom it? I saw him transfuse blood from one living being to another. I saw him with a hypodermic tube inject cellular matter into deadened brains. I saw first one, then another, of the orphan children begin to age, like leaves turning yellow . . . He drew their blood. I came to understand the pure scientific temperament as it shone from this man. It produced a mind that was unshockable, a man for whom there was no sacrilege . . .

The search for Martin permits McIlvaine and his official companion, a cop named Donne (*sic*, again), to poke around the haunts of Gotham high and low. As Doctorow spins his polished tale, this less than dynamic duo pursue their inquiry in set pieces of Tweedy corruption, brownstone gentility, and raffish disorder; much is made of the great water reservoir that in those days dominated the present-day site of Bryant Park. Eventually Martin is freed, the doctor's lair is uncovered, justice triumphs, and Boss Tweed is last heard of in a Cuban jungle. It's a neat piece of genre writing and gently entertaining. Or is it? Why would E. L. Doctorow, a distinguished novelist and professor at my university, play around with a creaky tale from the files of Rod Serling? Why would Doctorow rewrite a chunk of sci-fi hematology that might have come from Poe's "The Premature Burial"?

> The procedure involved the withdrawal of bone marrow from my leg. . . . I told him I'd like to think about it. This was not an answer in the scientific spirit . . . which he must have understood before I did. Perhaps the spell of him was wearing off . . . but I began at night to dream of that frowning nut-brown boy in my father's coffin at Woodlawn. . . . I was dreaming of him . . . but it was a kind of awakening . . . or reawakening . . . to the specific therapies by which Sartorius contrived to exempt the old gentlemen from death. . . . This was a windowless, gaslit place . . . with its machinery always humming . . . and a humidity in the air that made me feel sometimes I was underwater . . . or that this was a hermetic undersea vault I was sealed in.

I have a hunch that Doctorow's slight book—thickened for the trade by its avalanche of ellipses—is a skillful gloss on what Poe's biographer Kenneth Silverman has called

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"The Longfellow Wars." That contretemps between Longfellow, the well-heeled Harvard professor, and Poe, the impoverished West Pointer, touched on conflicts not only between classes but also between art and science, reason and feeling, urge and action—between North and South, for that matter. On October 16, 1845, a disheveled Edgar Allan Poe gave a poetry reading to a Lyceum audience in Boston. He had already launched a series of polemics against the "transcendentalists," "Swedenborgians," "abolitionists," and "Harvard professors"—Longfellow in particular—who dominated the New England literary scene. But that evening, facing the Brahmins, he was more confused than combative. Thomas Wentworth Higginson writes that Poe, "in a sort of persistent, querulous way, which . . . impressed me at the time as nauseous flattery," went on to throw his audience into sheer stupor. After an extensive apology for not having delivered new material, Poe read *in toto* his early, befuddled poem "Al Aaraaf." The audience dwindled rapidly, presumably because, like Higginson, they were perplexed. Not even an impromptu recital of "The Raven" could rescue the evening. The occasion confirmed Lowell's final estimate:

> There comes Poe with his raven, like Barnaby Rudge,
> Three-fifths of him genius and two-fifths sheer fudge.

The months after the debacle were followed by The Lyceum Wars. The unsparing Boston reviews of his Lyceum performance were answered by Poe with a torrent of invective, shotgun critique, and *ad personem* attacks, mostly published in his own *Broadway Journal*. He went out of his way to accuse the Boston literati of cronyism, muddleheadedness, and plagiarism. Predictably, Longfellow was the chief target. But he also called Margaret Fuller "a detestable old maid," James Russell Lowell "a ranting abolitionist," and Longfellow a plagiarist who appealed only to "those negrophilic old ladies of the North." Poe then committed the unforgivable: he insulted Boston itself—its food, its hotels, the architecture of its State House, and the squalor of its duck pond, now invaded by frogs. Longfellow himself paid only passing attention to those attacks, as he had brushed off Poe's 1842 attack on his metrical schemes:

> In hexameter sings serenely the Harvard Professor
> In pentameter him damns censorious Poe.

Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, Parkman Professor of Anatomy and Physiology at the Harvard Medical School—and the man who invented the term "Brahmin" in his 1861 novel *Elsie Venner*—eventually had the last word in *The Professor at the Breakfast Table*:

> After a man begins to attack the State House, when he gets bitter about the Frog-pond, you may be sure that there is not much left of him. Poor Edgar Poe died in the hospital soon after he got into this way of talking . . . Remember poor Edgar! He is dead and gone, but the State House has its cupola fresh-gilded, and the Frog-pond has got a fountain that squirts up a hundred feet into the air.

Poe's quarrel with the Boston literary establishment of reformers, abolitionists, and feminists was another aspect of his internal war between fact and fancy, science and art. As a cadet officer he had been drawn to many aspects of science and mathematics, as a Virginian he had squelched them in favor of poetic urges. Poe's earliest book of verse (1829) contains this "Sonnet to Science":

> Science! true daughter of Old Time thou art!
> Who alterest all things with thy peering eyes.
> Why preyest thou thus upon the poet's heart,
> Vulture, whose wings are dull realities?
> . . .
> Hast thou not torn the Naiad from her flood,
> The Elfin from the green grass, and from me
> The summer dream beneath the tamarind tree?

Poe's "Science" sonnet is not just a clumsy gloss on Keats's "Lamia" ("Philosophy will

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clip an Angels's wing") any more than *The Waterworks* is only a gloss on "The Fall of the House of Usher" or "The Premature Burial." "To Science" helps us to understand why Poe was so vexed with Longfellow, Lowell, Higginson, Fuller, and the rest. The politics are not difficult to untangle. In the antebellum period, the North in general, and Boston in particular, was regarded by Southerners as a rampart of roundhead values, concerned with the "dull realities" of science, machines, and trade. Poor Poe, on the other hand, fancied himself a son of the cavalier South. A sometime soldier, disinherited but awash in plantation longings, he yearned on Broadway for the summer dream beneath the tamarind tree. These days, the North–South axis, the meridian between Boston and Richmond, between duty and languor, attracts at its southern extreme many of those disenchanted by modern science, among them the fans of magic realism, the airhead audiences that loved the film *The Piano*.

The Waterworks helps us to understand why the aging remnants of the New Left—as opposed to the Old Left of dialectical materialism—are now solidly arrayed against modern science. The politics are also not difficult to untangle. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel* was his attempt to justify the Old Left to the New, to tell the kids who burned their draft cards what Paul Robeson sang at Peekskill. In that novel's final lyrical outburst, Doctorow concludes that capitalism and science are enemies of the young and that only Nature can be trusted. *Loon Lake* was another of Doctorow's sermons on that neo-Arcadian text. From *The Greening of America* to *Loon Lake*, the New Left has learned its lesson well: Mother Earth makes fewer demands than Mother Russia.

In *The Book of Daniel*, Doctorow followed his revisionist account of the Cold War with complaints about the early failure of heart transplants. "Medical science has much to learn!" he concluded. Of course, one might add, but so did the SDS. In *The Waterworks*, McIlvaine exclaims: "I could not sleep, I was haunted . . . not by ghosts, but by Science. I felt afflicted with intolerable reality." For Doctorow, the "intolerable reality" of science is an aspect of a sinister world order, a world of fact without value, a demonized world of Doctor Sartorius: "a concordance of wealth, and government, and science [and] a profound . . . derangement of the natural order of fathers and sons." Poe was there first with his:

> Why preyest thou thus upon the poet's heart,
> Vulture, whose wings are dull realities?

Perhaps the most overt iteration of the Mother Earth theme comes immediately after McIlvaine rescues Martin from the cell in which Sartorius has him imprisoned:

> Ever since this day I have dreamt sometimes . . . I, a street rat in my soul, dream even now . . . that if it were possible to lift this littered, paved Manhattan from the earth . . . how seedlings would sprout, and freshets bubble up, and brush and grasses would grow over the rolling hills . . . A season or two of this and the mute, protesting culture buried for so many industrial years under the tenements and factories . . . would rise again . . . of the lean, religious Indians of the bounteous earth, who lived without money or lasting architecture, flat and close to the ground—hunting, trapping, fishing, growing their corn and praying . . . always praying in solemn thanksgiving for their clear and short life in this quiet universe. Such love I have for those savage polytheists of my mind . . . those friends of light and leaf.

This remarkable passage, set in the fictional New York of McIlvaine, is clearly a sentiment prompted by E. L. Doctorow's New York of 1994. It is difficult to square these urges with the facts either of the author's life or of his city. "Street rat in his soul"? "Without money or lasting architecture"? According to my *Who's Who in America*, Doctorow is the Glucksman Professor of English and American Letters at New York University, a former editor in chief and vice president of the Dial Press, author of at

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least five best sellers, and recipient of the National Book Critics Circle Award (twice), the National Book Award, the PEN/Faulkner Award, the Edith Wharton Citation for Fiction, and the William Dean Howells Medal of the American Academy of Arts and Letters (of which he is a member of the Institute). He has received several honorary degrees, is on the Board of Directors of the Author's Guild, and is a member of the Century Association. Nevertheless, in *The Waterworks* Doctorow proclaims the perfidy of institutions, claiming that "the institutional mind has only one mental operation: It abhors truth."

McIlvaine attends a glittering reception given by the Improvement Society, an occasion the likes of which Book Award recipients cannot have escaped. Doctorow professes the street-rat side of his nature:

> Behind the police cordons, aflame in the gaslight, a brilliant street assemblage of drunks, louts and harridans made insulting remarks, some of them very funny, about each and every couple who stepped down from their carriage and walked into the hotel. Glorious laughter, hoots, jeers from the people in whose behalf the Improvers were sacrificing themselves! I held [my partner's] elbow and steered her through the doors, feeling in spirit like one who belonged behind the cordon, and knowing I would be fully deserving if a rock came flying through the air and knocked my top hat off.

Professor Doctorow's reflection on pre-Stuyvesant Indian life in Manhattan also seems disingenuous. "Thanksgiving for their clear and short life?" Who would presume to tell *anyone* that early and violent death from infective disease of one's wife and children is preferable to their survival? It has been estimated that the Native American population had a life expectancy of one generation. And as for an effect on those clear and short lives spent "so many industrial years under the tenements and factories," the actual numbers may be worth noting. The death rate in New York City in 1845, that pre-tenement and pre-industrial era of Edgar Allan Poe, was 27.3 per thousand a year and the average life expectancy was in the forties. In our day, Doctorow's New York City, the death rate has dropped to 9.1 per thousand and life expectancy risen to almost eighty. This was no achievement of street rats, but of those who formed Improvement Societies. The Sanitarians of New York who cleaned our water and built our sewers—among them Frederick Law Olmsted and George Templeton Strong—played no small role in that history.

History, the real thing, is not always well served in *The Waterworks*. To begin with, no one in the nineteenth century referred to the trinomial Dr. Holmes as "Mr." Three other examples should suffice. Our journalist is assured in 1871 that the Sanitarians revamped the system of water supply in response to the theory of infection: "[The view of Dr. Sartorius] would seem to be gaining authority, especially from the fermentation experiments of Mr. Pasteur, in France, and new rumors of the isolation by Dr. Koch in Germany of a cholera vibrio." In 1871, however, Robert Koch was a medical student in Hamburg; he did not describe the comma bacillus until 1883, when the fifth pandemic of cholera crawled north along the Suez Canal. Doctorow has McIlvaine describe an orchestrion in the inner chamber of the waterworks: "The great golden disc revolved that beat the drum and shook the bells and plucked out the chords of a robotic waltz." But the word robot was not invented until 1921, when the Czech playwright Karel Capek coined it in his play *R.U.R.* Finally, Martin Pemberton's father has persuaded one and all that "he would be taking a course of treatment at a sanitarium in Saranac Lake in the Adirondacks," but the first of these did not open until more than a decade later. Fans of lost children will remember that Robert Louis Stevenson traveled from Loon Lake to Saranac to be treated at Trudeau's new Cottage Hospital in 1887.

Be that as it may, one might say that *The Waterworks* is simply one more visit to Doc-

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torow's field of dreams, that bookstall filled with sentimental memoirs of a Bronx boyhood, tough times, and good books. If the temperament is saturnine, the writing is often elegant and the images crisp. But Chamfort comes to mind. Doctorow's ideas are public, and the wisdom conventional: Industry and science are wasted, commerce and government corrupt; the poor and savage noble. That hairshirt has been worn to the bank before. This time Doctorow's story was Poe and the mad doctor, the last time it was James M. Cain and the gun moll. Next time around perhaps, he'll forgive Longfellow and resurrect Hiawatha. Sci-fi, tough guy, and Indian brave are the stuff of boyhood sentiment, but the one border sentiment cannot cross is that of the New and for that reason Doctorow will likely remain haunted by Science.

The comic muse

John Gross, editor
The Oxford Book of Comic Verse.
Oxford University Press,
512 pages, $25

reviewed by Guy Davenport

We trust seriousness to be the firm ground beneath our feet while knowing full well that it is ultimately dull and probably inhuman. The phrases "Protestant bombing," "Christian militia," and "Abstract Expressionism" make no sense. We have had Swifts and Juvenals who could hack at the stupidities seriousness thrives on. Their weapon, or tool, is satire, which at its best is actionable and not always protected by the First Amendment. The Romans outlawed it, and several talented satirists found themselves living beyond the Oxus. But satire's little sister, Comedy, was civilized quite early and given the run of the house. Our understanding is that satire is sneaky, unfair, and takes no prisoners. He knows right from wrong, he has stern morals, and leaves bruises. Comedy is a free spirit, full of fun, and has no intention of explaining herself. In fact, much of her charm is in her mystery, in eluding the serious as successfully as a kitten who doesn't wish to be caught.

She loves it when Dan Quayle spells P-O-T-A-T-O-E, as spelling and vice presidents are equally boring, and part of her fun (as she is co-eval with civilization) is in knowing—but never telling—that Samuels Johnson and Beckett both wrote *potatoe* (Shakespeare got it right).

Why is this humble verse, poet unknown, comic?

> Carnation milk is the best in the land.
> I've got a can of it here in my hand—
> No teats to pull, no hay to pitch:
> You just punch a hole in the son of a bitch.

Elizabeth the First would have laughed; Victoria wouldn't. Comedy defines its audience, and may be the most intelligent reach of the mind. And yet it does nothing but play:

> We shall all go to heaven when we die
> And many of us stand on the head of a pin,
> Four or five of us, if we try;
> Six or seven, if we all squeeze in.

That's Ian Hamilton Finlay, whose sense of humor has upset several European governments, and whose *Glasgow Beasts, an a Burd, Haw, an Inseks, an, a Fush* (written in the Glaswegian) might have furnished John Gross with some puckish epigrams. But any anthology of English comic verse is a feast from an overflowing pantry, for English writing and art are different in having cast practically all of their masterpieces in the comic mode. There's Chaucer (represented here for his humor of perception rather than his slapstick bawdy or parody), Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Smollett, Dickens, Thackeray, and on out to Joyce.

France has Rabelais, Molière, and Daudet; Spain, Cervantes; Russia, Gogol—every people has something in the comic mode, even Denmark and Arkansas. But the British along with their outriding cousins the

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Americans, Irish, Scotch, and Welsh have a world monopoly on the comic. They are the Greeks *de nos jours*.

So, whereas it's bad manners to natter at an anthologist's choices, it is a tribute to his subject to ask where's Samuel Butler II's "A Psalm of Montreal," one of the funniest poems in the language (with its refrain of "O God! O Montreal!" ending each stanza). Or that master of the vernacular windfall, Jonathan Williams? Or those latter-day masters of the classical epigram, J. V. Cunningham and James Laughlin?

John Gross, theater critic and from 1974 to 1981 editor of *The Times Literary Supplement*, has compiled a wonderfully rich compendium. Nobody reads an anthology; that's not what it's for. It is a book for the bedside table. It is a definition and illustration of its subject. The *Oxford Book*s (*of Dreams*, *of Literary Anecdotes*, presumably, in time, of everything under the sun—one on *Money* is in the works) are medieval (or Victorian) in their enterprise: a diligent editor's selection ("anthology" means in Greek a bouquet, or garland, of flowers) of what many writers have most sharply said about a topic. *The Oxford Book of Sunsets* would not greatly surprise me, though it might indicate that they are getting near the bottom of the barrel.

There are many *trouvailles* in Gross's anthology. It is innovative and fresh; in fact, it has an air about it of being rebelliously original. Anthologies are the most strategic means at the critic's disposal. They are the true academies, in the old sense, establishing and demolishing reputations by inclusion or exclusion. Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry* (1961) added a new wing to the house of literature. Ezra Pound's early revolutionary activism was in specific rebellion against Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*. Any museum on new principles gives us a new art.

An anthologist can therefore respond to all criticism with "Go make your own anthology." There is middle ground, however, for rational discussion, wherein ideas might be traded. I would have put in Marianne Moore's "Marriage" as one of the wittiest and most comically argued apologias for spinsterhood. And Wallace Stevens, for whom comedy was always the wind in the sails of his philosophical ship. Mr. Gross has rightly left out the bawdy and the coarse, which belong more properly to satire.

On the grounds that comedy is at its best when it makes fun of the serious, I would have included Kipling's "McAndrew's Hymn," and for comedy's ability to mock the mocker, Ralph Hodgson's "Eve." This wickedly merry poem is about Enid Bagnold's seduction by Frank Harris (as Miss Bagnold disclosed in her autobiography), an event deplored by Hodgson and eventually by the seduced. It is a poem that shows how the comic spirit is most articulate when it has a rich culture at its disposal: a prosody surviving from the Middle Ages, a religious myth, a naughty novel by Aubrey Beardsley, a dark phrase from Blake, and a personal animus against seducers. And yet it is, as the critics say, light verse, practically a nursery rhyme. It begins:

> Eve, with her basket, was
> Deep in the bells and grass,
> Wading in bells and grass
> Up to her knees,
> Picking a dish of sweet
> Berries and plums to eat,
> Down in the bells and grass
> Under the trees.

The Oxford Book of Literary Anecdotes, edited by James Sutherland (1975), is largely a compilation of occasions on which authors were gratuitously mean to a victim of their wit. There is no such theme in Mr. Gross's collection, unless it is the British discomfiture with muddle (P. G. Wodehouse on proofreaders) and sham (Max Beerbohm parodying Hilaire Belloc). A critic looking for a theory to bring this bountiful anthology together might muse that comedy is a weapon with which sweetness and light tease, guy, torment, sass, bedevil, and spit on stupidity and vice. But that is too glumly moral an agenda for comic verse, the genius

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of which, as John Gross's anthology proves, is its delight in the playfulness of language and its wild freedom when it encounters any convention whatever.

Ironic spirits—& others

Brad Leithauser, editor
The Norton Book of Ghost Stories.
Norton, 430 pages, $25

reviewed by Alan Rutenberg

There are ghosts in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* and *Don Giovanni*. What does it mean that figures who populate the lower literary orders also appear in some of the central works of our culture? Is a belief in ghosts merely a childish superstition, surmounted by those adults who read ghost stories as a form of titillation? Or is a belief in ghosts a serious acknowledgment of evil? Are these literary questions, or theological ones? Such are the night thoughts that arise while reading an anthology of ghost stories.

In his introduction to this anthology, Brad Leithauser contests the psychological interpretation of "The Turn of the Screw" that Edmund Wilson advanced in his essay "The Ambiguity of Henry James." Wilson was, as ever, determined to bring order to an unruly landscape, and he settled the numerous ambiguities of "The Turn of the Screw" through a consistent psychological reading that precluded the actual existence of the ghosts that the governess in the story claimed to have seen. Mr. Leithauser, caustically noting that Wilson's essay "might still serve as a prime illustration of how on occasion even the most brilliant thinker can become, in the fervent pursuit of a half-truth, a half-wit," argues against finding a solution to "The Turn of the Screw." Mr. Leithauser asserts that without an allowance for the external, material existence of ghosts, entirely apart from their internal, psychological meanings, the reader too readily forecloses and therefore simplifies the interpretation of the ghost story. He writes: "Ghostly horror hinges upon this issue of *ex*ternality—the fear of something out there that is *not* oneself, something wholly independent of one's wishes and feelings." While Mr. Leithauser clearly affirms his preference for the psychological ghost story, it nevertheless remains the case, in his view, that in order to read any ghost story properly, you must at the very least entertain a belief in the possibility of ghosts.

Perhaps the most obvious trouble with this argument is that a significant number of the writers represented in this anthology do not appear to agree with it. Though the volume begins with an early story by Henry James and continues with three of his later tales, it is otherwise limited to stories of the twentieth century; among the writers represented here are Edith Wharton, Saki, Elizabeth Bowen, V. S. Pritchett, Muriel Spark, John Cheever, and Penelope Fitzgerald. A considerable number of these stories are written, in the inevitable fashion of our century, with a high degree of self-consciousness; they have a tendency to become stories about ghost stories, or about the consequences of belief in ghosts, rather than truly ghostly tales.

If the ghost stories of the nineteenth century remain compelling for serious readers, it is not because of their gothic machinery but because of the way that they animate and represent subtle psychological states. At their best, in writers such as Hoffmann and Poe, these ghost stories manifest another aspect of the romantic interest in introspection. In his essay "The Uncanny," Freud emphasizes this relevant perception of Schelling: "'Unheimlich' [the uncanny] is the name for everything that ought to have remained . . . secret and hidden but has come to light."

Certainly the authors who follow Henry James in this anthology suffer in comparison with him, and not merely because they are not of his stature. He is the last of them to believe fully that ghosts are credible as resonant metaphors for psychological states. The first of his stories represented here, "The Romance of Certain Old Clothes," is quite

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early, and it has a schematic quality that is at once impressive and predictable. James proves his mastery of a popular genre while remaining entirely within its already worn conventions. Of course it is the genius of the truly popular genres that worn conventions sustain the predictability which readers require; originality is not especially welcome. In order for ghost stories to appeal to serious readers of the late twentieth century, they must provide either the experience of the uncanny or the pleasure of irony.

The three later stories of Henry James included here, "The Friends of the Friends," "Maud-Evelyn," and "Sir Edmund Orme," date from the 1890s, as does "The Turn of the Screw"; all of these stories conform readily to Schelling's conception of the uncanny as an instrument of introspection. In "Sir Edmund Orme," for instance, the narrator regularly encounters a ghost who is visible only to the narrator himself and to the mother of the young woman he is courting. It is typical of the psychological complexity of Henry James that the ghost reveals the past of the mother while illuminating the present of the narrator. For the later James, the ghostly tales are no less an occasion for complexity than any other stories.

Mr. Leithauser makes much of the contrast between Henry James and the second author represented in the anthology, the scholarly English writer M. R. James, yet it seems to me that Mr. Leithauser takes the latter rather too seriously. His intricately plotted tales present an elaborate, rococo, highly erudite, firmly aristocratic, resolutely unpsychological ghost story, with occasional comic narrative interventions. In other words, a perfectly adult confection.

This anthology, because it is limited to English and American stories primarily from the twentieth century, somewhat awkwardly raises the question whether the serious, literary ghost story still retains any considerable persuasive force. The truly compelling later stories in the anthology are all, in various degrees, more ironic than ghostly. In each case, the irony is that of the latecomer who recognizes that the persuasive power of the conventional ghost story has declined. This sense of belatedness is neither cynical nor playful; rather the position of the latecomer allows each author to use the conventions of the ghost story for more ironic purposes. As Freud notes, "even a 'real' ghost, as in Oscar Wilde's 'Canterville Ghost,' loses all power of at least arousing *gruesome* feelings in us as soon as the author begins to amuse himself by being ironical about it and allows liberties to be taken with it."

The ghost stories of Edith Wharton are, as one might expect, illuminating and ironic about mistaken beliefs in the supernatural. The fact that an earnest belief in ghosts is often allied to a refusal or inability to acknowledge death is perhaps best demonstrated in those ghost stories, such as Wharton's "Miss Mary Pask" and "The Looking Glass," which quite clearly reveal that their ghosts are mere illusions. "Surely she must have told you that she wasn't dead?" is one especially ironic form of such a revelation.

Elizabeth Bowen, in "The Cat Jumps," provides some acerbic irony about those modern minds who mistake the absence of superstition for the absence of all inwardness.

> They had light, bright, shadowless, thoroughly disinfected minds. They believed that they disbelieved in most things but were unprejudiced; they enjoyed frank discussions. They dreaded nothing but inhibitions; they had no inhibitions. They were pious agnostics, earnest for social reform; they explained everything to their children, and were annoyed to find their children could not sleep at nights because they thought there was a complex under the bed.

In "The Portobello Road," Muriel Spark has written a ghost story that in effect pivots around an uncanny sentence rather than an event. "He looked as if he would murder me and he did," announces the narrator, in a sentence possible only in fiction and only in the narration of a ghost. This confirms in unexpected fashion a paradox that Freud has noted: "that in the first place a great deal that

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is not uncanny in fiction would be so, if it happened in real life; and in the second place that there are many more means of creating uncanny effects in fiction than there are in real life."

Leon Edel suggests in his introduction to a collection of the ghost stories of Henry James that the *fin-de-siècle* atmosphere of the 1890s itself contributed to the profusion of ghostly tales that James wrote during that decade. In his criticism of Edmund Wilson, Mr. Leithauser unwittingly reflects one of the salient characteristics of our own *fin de siècle*, namely the intellectual slippage that degrades complexity and difficulty in favor of simplicity and comfort. Nowhere is this more evident than in the impoverished "spirituality" of the newer varieties of religious experience in which "New Age" doctrines dismiss the authority of history and tradition. A literal belief in the external existence of ghosts comports readily with this new dispensation. Such a belief all too easily represents a moral evasion of the uncomfortable responsibilities of the inner life and of the intractable primacy of character. A century ago, Henry James wrote ghost stories not to avoid the inner life, but to illuminate it.

Painted into history

Thomas Mallon Henry and Clara. Ticknor & Fields, 358 pages, $22.95

reviewed by Brooke Allen

"A work of inference, speculation, and outright invention": this is the way Thomas Mallon describes his new book, *Henry and Clara*. If one had to shoehorn it into a genre, "historical fiction" would make the easiest fit, but *Henry and Clara* is not strictly speaking a historical novel, or even a novel at all. It is inspired by the existence of two actual people, Clara Harris and Major Henry Rathbone, the affianced couple who sat with the Lincolns in their box at Ford's Theatre the night the President was assassinated. But while the bare events of their lives, truthfully reported, provide a "scaffold" for Mallon's tale, the emotions, motivations, and contribution to history that the author assigns his characters are all his own inventions. They add up to a work which is neither history nor fiction but an imaginative alteration of events, a provocative might-have-been.

The story begins with Henry and Clara's parents, also real characters. Pauline Rathbone, left a widow after the death of Henry's father, a mayor of Albany, fears a future of loneliness and, worse than that, political obscurity; accordingly, and without considering their disparate hopes and ambitions, she sets her cap for a middle-aged Albany judge named Ira Harris, also recently widowed. Ira and Pauline marry and bring their numerous children, including eleven-year-old Henry and thirteen-year-old Clara, into one family.

Thus begins the lifelong love affair between Henry and Clara, an affair always sordidly colored by their perceived status as brother and sister. Both parents are disturbed by the match, not so much because they look upon the pair as siblings as because the Harrises and the Rathbones have turned out to be incompatible as families. The ambitious Pauline, craving glitter and publicity, scorns the milquetoast Ira, with his lack of ambition and his "reluctant progressivism," as much as she despises his conventional children. Ira, for his part, distrusts the young Henry as a cynic and an iconoclast. The two families' contrasting styles are comically played out at Henry's graduation from Union College in 1857: Ira, a reverent alumnus, is appalled by his stepson's commencement speech, which takes in vain the name of that exalted cultural idol, Emerson. "History's whirlwinds are not ours to tame," Henry tells his audience of fellow-graduates, young men who will soon realize the prescience of Henry's words on the battlefields of the Civil War. "The American Idol is civility, and that idol is shaking in the winds that now besiege the national temple."

Ira's entire world is built upon American

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civility, and he becomes a helpless witness to history when by a freak of political patronage he is unexpectedly elected to the U.S. Senate. The assorted Harrises and Rathbones arrive in Washington at the beginning of the Lincoln administration in 1861 and are thenceforth at the very center of political events as members of the Lincolns' innermost circle. The war postpones the question of Clara and Henry's marriage; Clara stays in the embattled capital and Henry joins the Twelfth New York Regiment, surviving action at Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, and finally the massacre at Petersburg.

The strange and unquenchable rage in his nature is oddly fulfilled by the experience of battle, and some of Mallon's finest writing goes into Henry's letters home.

> Being fired upon was the most extraordinary experience—*personally* thrilling. Each bullet, it seemed, was intended just for me. In fact, I was probably no more visible to whichever soldier was firing from behind the trees than he was to me. But, whoever he was, I wanted to dash into the brush after him, to find him and slash his throat with the blade of my bayonet. I would have done so entirely without malice, with only a strong desire to know just who he was, to gaze upon his face, as if it were another side of my own.

Even the terrible sight of trapped soldiers being slaughtered in the crater at Petersburg, which causes Henry to invoke Milton's vision of Hell, is somehow exciting to him—in fact, it is Henry's recognition of this excitement that triggers his first mental breakdown. For Clara, whose sexual passion for Henry and determination to marry him at all costs blinds her to the sufferings of others, the war is significant only insofar as it keeps them apart.

In 1865, with hostilities at an end, the Harrises finally agree to the marriage and it is thus as an officially engaged couple that Henry and Clara accompany the Lincolns to the theater on April 14, filling in for General Grant and his wife at the last minute. They witness the murder but are unable to stop it, though Henry struggles with Booth and is badly stabbed. Mallon includes an actual letter by Clara Harris (now in the New-York Historical Society) describing the assassination:

> Henry . . . bled so profusely as to make him very weak. My whole clothing as I sat in the box was saturated literally with blood, & my hands & face—You may imagine what a scene. Poor Mrs. Lincoln all through that dreadful night would look at me in horror & scream, Oh! my husband's blood,—my dear husband's blood—which it was not, though I did not know it at the time. The President's wound did not bleed externally at all—The brain was instantly suffused.

Clara has "a strange feeling that she had been painted into history, inserted into a tableau." And she finds that history is not forgiving. For though Henry is not actually accused of negligence, there is an unspoken but widespread sentiment that he could, somehow, have acted to save the President, a sentiment that Henry, oddly enough, shares. For it turns out that Henry is in possession of "a secret sewn into the violence of that night."

This secret blights Henry and Clara's marriage, as Henry retreats ever further from his wife, children, and friends into a tormented world of his own and, finally, into madness. Yet many readers must wonder whether the marriage was not doomed long before Wilkes Booth's action or even the war itself. For *Henry and Clara* is also a commentary on Romanticism—Romanticism as a destructive force. The protagonists see themselves as characters from the Shakespeare play most treasured by the Romantics, *Hamlet*, and Henry himself is explicitly compared with Byron—in looks, in character, in his semi-incestuous seduction of his "sister."

> There was in him a vital scorn of all.
> As if the worst had fall'n which could befall,

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> He stood a stranger in this breathing world,
> An erring spirit from another hurl'd . . . .

One often suspects that the Byronic hero would be hell to live with, once the divine scorn is revealed as mere peevishness, the silence transmogrified into sulks. Henry more than fits this mold, and on top of everything else the real love of his life clearly is not his wife but his mother. Henry's ultimate failure as a husband is predictable to everyone but Clara. Clara, though, is in thrall to the Romantic ideal, and so lays the foundations for the disaster of her life, "this disaster of my own making, created from my stubborn, blind love."

Mallon's story-telling techniques are often stagy, often melodramatic, but within his skillfully established context of overheated Romanticism they are finally effective. He has some trouble establishing the authorial "voice," a common difficulty for those who essay historical fiction: Mallon's third-person narrative too often falls into an uneasy no-man's-land between nineteenth-century and modern diction. Far smoother are the invented letters and diary excerpts, where Mallon brilliantly succeeds in giving Clara a convincing and moving voice, "period" yet vividly contemporary.

Mallon ices his rich cake with delicious historical details, describing, for example, the Lincolns' dinner for Napoleon III and the arrival of the Seventh New York Regiment in Washington, "a bewildered few of whom still reverently carried the sandwiches that Delmonico's had provided at their departure." He also sets the icons of the period in a human scale. Clara observes at a lecture by Henry Ward Beecher that "the man's vanity coated every syllable he coddled from his throat, and all the foot-stomping and arm-flailing reminded her of some Indian dance in one of Mr. Cooper's novels"; President Lincoln, uncomfortable with the proposed coupling of stepbrother and stepsister, asks "Where is your good father this week?", "looking first at Clara and then at Major Rathbone, unsure which one to put the question to."

Despite its rather ponderous beginning, *Henry and Clara* is triumphantly successful as a suspenseful and satisfying work of art. But while Mallon's skill is always in evidence, there is something disturbing about his central proposition of fictionalizing real people, of ascribing opinions, passions, vices, and even crimes to persons who most certainly had quite different opinions, passions, vices, and crimes of their own. If a writer were to work this magic upon subjects who had died, say, only five years ago —who would therefore have friends and relations still among the living—he would be thought to have taken an intolerable, even libelous, liberty. But the Rathbones, dead for a century, are fair game to be cast as the raw materials of art. Mallon's technique is not uncommon: E. L. Doctorow practices it regularly, and recently historical speculation was spuriously presented as history in Oliver Stone's *JFK*. Doctorow's and Mallon's games with history are generally considered to be valid artistic activities, and, since these authors don't pretend to be writing the literal truth, their techniques are not actually dishonest. Nevertheless, it is a conceit with which not every reader will be comfortable.

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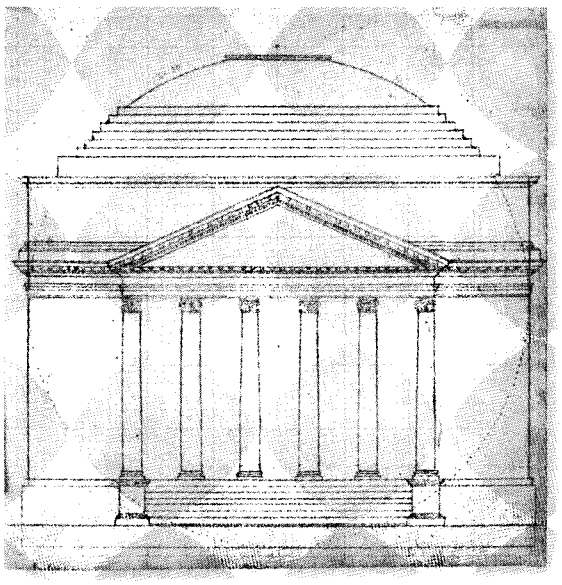

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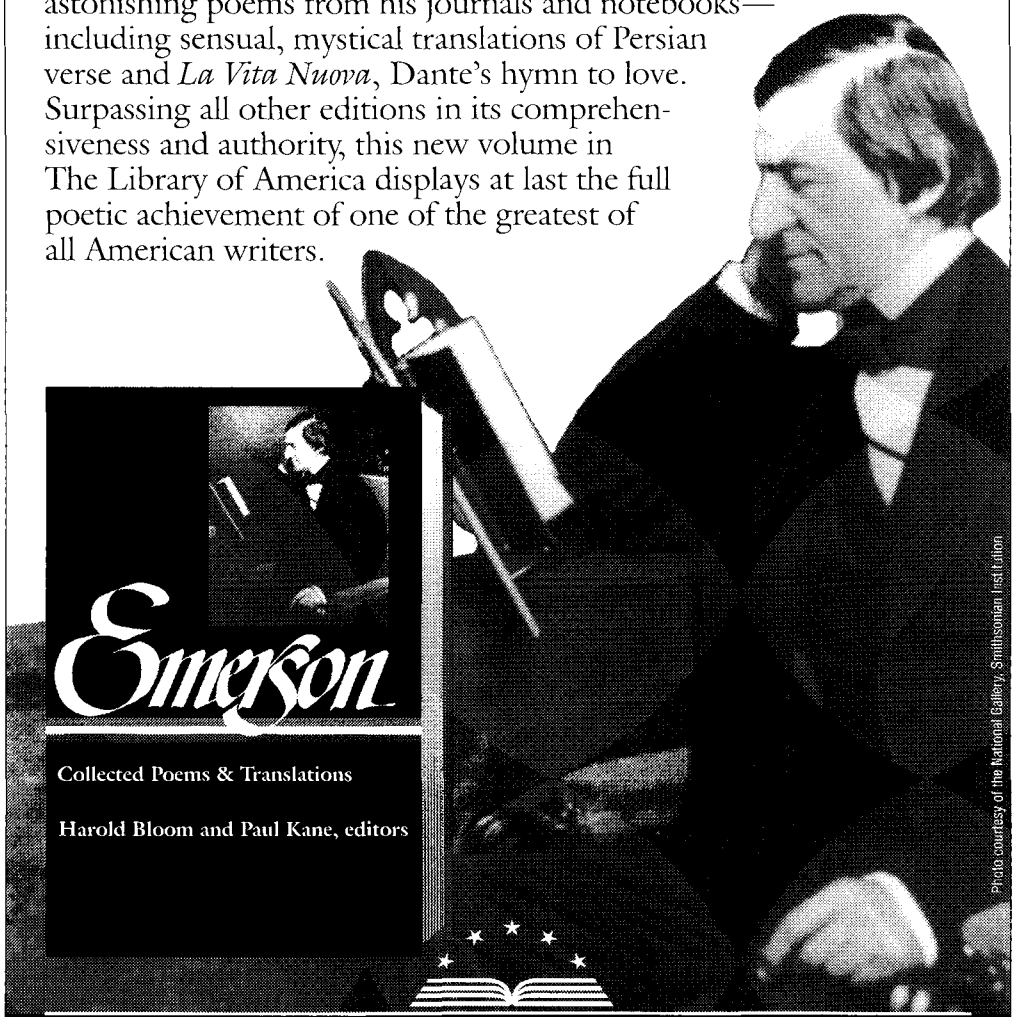
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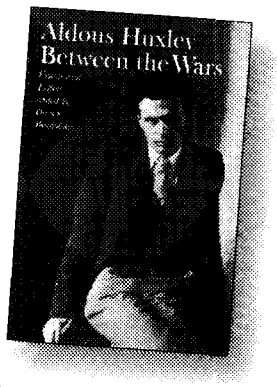

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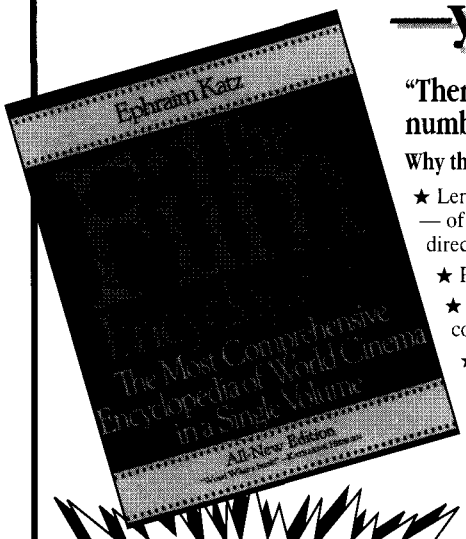

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